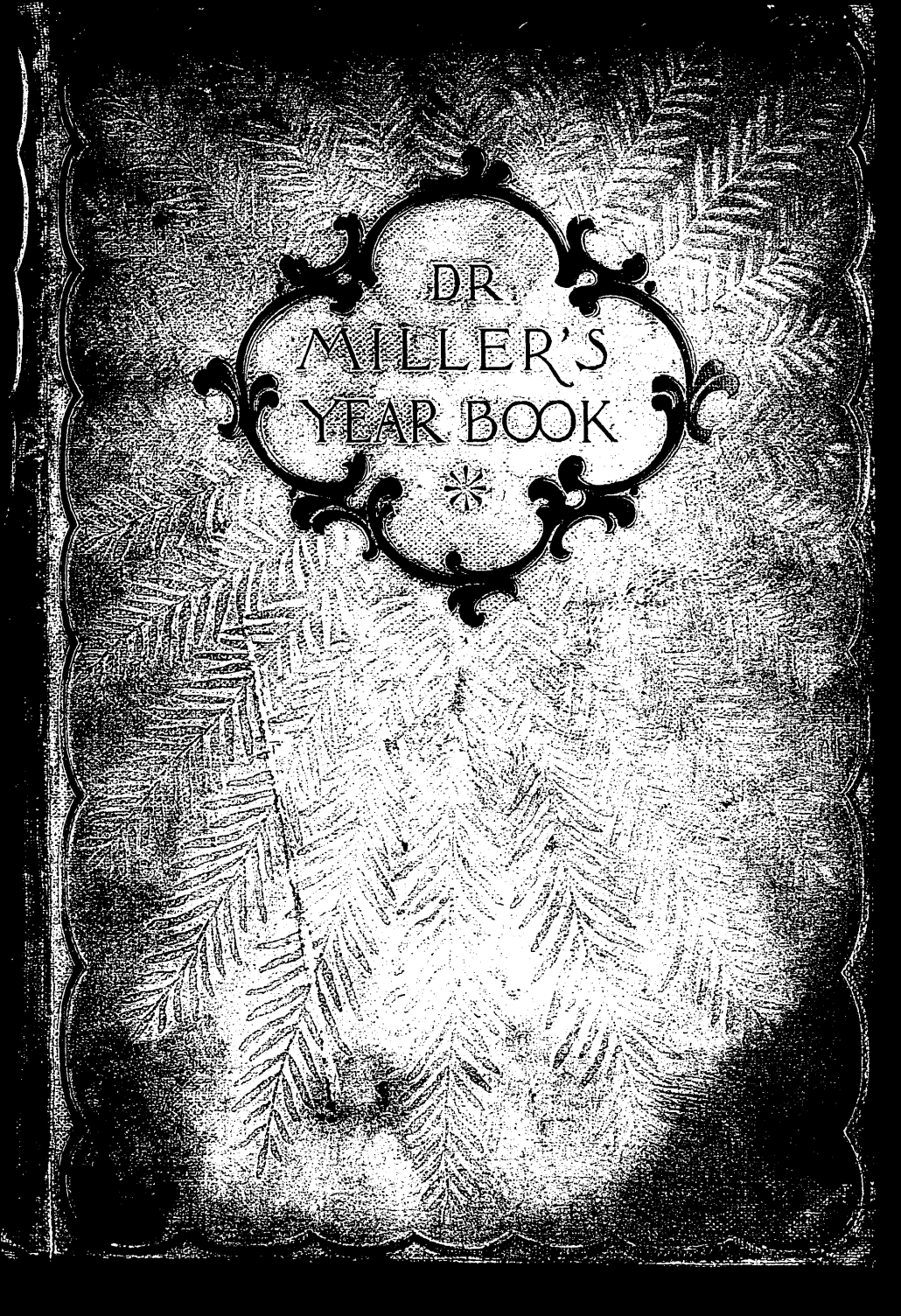

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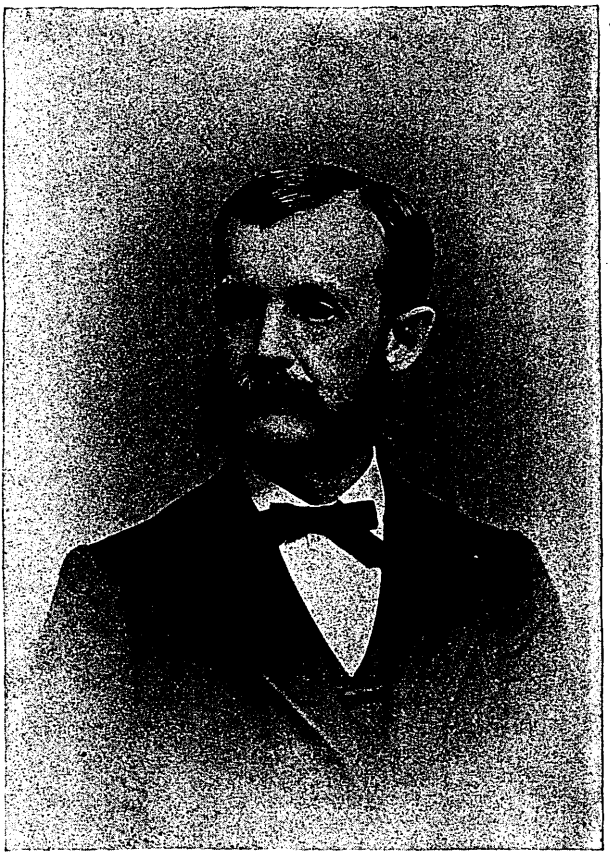
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A YEAR'S DAILY READINGS

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J. R. MILLER, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "SILENT TIMES," "MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE," "THE EVERYDAY OF LIFE," "GLIMPSES THRO' LIFE'S WINDOWS," ETC.

Why cannot we, slipping our hand into His each day, walk trustingly over the day's appointed path, thorny or flowery, crooked or straight, knowing that evening will bring us sleep, peace, and home?

PHILLIPS BROOKS.

NEW YORK: 46 EAST 14TH STREET

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A VERSE of Scripture in the morning may become a benediction for all the day. It may sing in the heart as a snatch of sweet song from morning till evening. It may become a liturgy of prayer in which the soul shall voice its deepest wants and hungers, amid toils, struggles, and cares. It may be a guide through perplexing tangles, an angel whispering cheer, a comforter breathing peace in sorrow.

In these pages a Bible text — oft-times only a fragment — stands at the head, with some words which may illustrate and emphasize the thought of the Scripture, and frequently with some quoted lines which may have a message to the reader.

No effort has been made to follow any chronological or other order, save that in a few cases fragments of the same story are kept together.

If there seem to be fewer texts from the Gospels than one would expect, the reason is that in another volume — *Come Ye Apart*, published by Ward and Drummond, New York — the author has taken all the year's readings from the Gospels, following the course of our Lord's earthly life from beginning to close.

For the title of the book, my good friends the publishers are responsible. I would have preferred something more impersonal, but I have let them have their way.

J. R. M.

PHILADELPHIA.

January 1.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee:
The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. — NUMBERS vi. 24–26.

IN the first days of a new year we all say to our friends and neighbors, "Happy New Year!" Our hearts are full of generous feelings and wishes for all we meet. But what can we do to give them a happy new year? We cannot compel their circumstances into fortunate adjustments, so as to produce happiness. Besides, we cannot know what would be the truest and best blessings for our friends.

After all, the only really safe thing is to pray that God may be with them through the year, and may bless them in his own best and truest way. He knows better than we do what is the best blessing. Mrs. Browning puts it well: —

"God be with thee, my beloved — God be with thee!
Else alone thou goest forth
With thy face unto the north,
Moor and pleasance all around thee and beneath thee,
Looking equal in one snow!
While I, who try to reach thee,
Vainly follow, vainly follow,
With the farewell and the hallo,
And cannot reach thee so.
Alas! I can but teach thee —
God be with thee, my beloved — God be with thee!"

January 2.

Ye have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward. — DEUTERONOMY ii. 3.

WE ought never to be willing to live any year just as we lived the last one. No one is striving after the best things who is not intent on an upward and a forward movement continually. The circular movement is essential too, — the going around and around in the old grooves, — routine work, daily tasks; yet, even in this treadmill round, there should be constant progress. We ought to do the same things better each day. Then in the midst of the outward routine our inner life ought to be growing in earnestness, in force, in strength, in depth.

Yet there are some people whose life year by year is only a going around and around in the old beaten paths, with no onward movement. They are like men who walk in a circular course for a prize, covering a thousand miles, perhaps, but ending just where they began. Rather, our daily walk should be like one whose path goes about a mountain, but climbs a little higher with each circuit, until at last he gains the clear summit, and looks into the face of God. While we must do in a measure the same things every day, we should do them a little better with each repetition. One writes: —

> "Speak a shade more kindly than the year before;
> Pray a little oftener; love a little more;
> Cling a little closer to the Father's love;
> Thus life below shall liker grow to life above."

January 3.

The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail. — 1 KINGS xvii. 16.

THERE was always just a little meal and a little oil, but the supply never grew any less. After each day's food had been taken out, there was another day's left. There was never a month's supply ahead, nor even two days' supply. The added provision came only as there was need. Thus there was in that household a continuous lesson in faith. But the food of no day failed.

The lesson is, that God wants us to live by the day. The same truth is taught us in the prayer Christ gave: "Give us this day our daily bread." Enough for the day is all we are to ask. God does not promise supplies in advance. If we have only bread for to-day, and are doing our duty faithfully, we may trust him till to-morrow for to-morrow's food. And it will surely come, for God's word fails not.

> "Charge not thyself with the weight of a year,
> Child of the Master, faithful and dear;
> Choose not the cross for the coming week,
> For that is more than he bids thee seek.
> Bend not thine arms for to-morrow's load;
> Thou mayest leave that to thy gracious God.
> 'Daily,' only, he saith to thee,
> 'Take up thy cross and follow me.'"

It is well that we get this lesson fixed in our heart at the beginning of the year. As the days come, each one will bring with it its own little basket, carrying a day's supplies, but no more.

January 4.

If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples. — St. John viii. 31.

IT is not enough to begin; continuance is necessary. Mere enrolment will not make one a scholar; the pupil must continue in the school through all the long course, until he has mastered every branch. One who has observed the course of men for many years says that success in life depends upon staying power. The reason for failure in most cases is lack of perseverance. Men get tired and give up. There are thousands who begin to follow Christ, but who, when discouragements come, faint and drop out.

To abide in Christ's word is to obey him. We must do it continuously too; not to-day only, but to-morrow as well, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, unto the end.

There is another way of abiding in the word of Christ. Many of his words are promises. The forests in summer days are full of birds'-nests. They are hidden among the leaves. The little birds know where they are; and when a storm arises, or when night draws on, they fly each to his own nest. So the promises of God are hidden in the Bible, like nests in the great forests; and thither we should fly in any danger or alarm, hiding there in our soul's nest until the storm be overpast. There are no castles in this world so impregnable as the words of Christ.

January 5.

We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.— St. John ix. 4.

WE are all in this world on divine missions, are all sent from God to take some specific part in blessing the world. To do this we have just a day of time. A day is a brief time. It is a fixed time. When the sun comes to his going down, no power in the universe can prolong his stay for one minute.

Yet the day is long enough for God's plan. The sun never sets too soon for his purpose. Each life is long enough for the little part of the world's work allotted to it. This is true even of the infant that lives only an hour, merely coming into this world, smiling its benediction, and flying away. It is true of the child, of the young man or young woman, of him who dies in the maturity of his powers with his hands yet full of unfinished tasks. No one can ever offer as an excuse for an unfinished life-work that the time given to him was too short. It is always long enough, if only every moment of it be filled with simple faithfulness.

To have our work completed at the end, we must do it while the day lasts, for there will be no opportunity afterward. If we are living earnestly, we shall live all the time under the pressure of the consciousness that the time is short. We must not waste nor lose a moment. Soon it will be night, when we cannot work.

January 6.

The pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them. — EXODUS xiv. 19.

IT is not always guidance that we most need. Sometimes we must stand still, with danger all around us, and then God goes behind us to shelter us. He always suits himself to our need. When we require guidance, he leads us. But when we need protection, he puts himself between us and the danger.

There is something very striking in this picture — the divine presence moving from before, and becoming a wall between Israel and their enemies. There are some mother-birds — storks, for instance — which cover their young with their own body in time of peril, to shield them, receiving the dart themselves. Human love often interposes itself as a shield to protect its own. On the cross, Jesus bared his bosom to receive the storm of wrath, that on his people no blast of the awful tempest might strike.

But not only does Christ put himself between us and our sins; he puts himself also between us and danger. The Lord God is our shield. Many of our dangers come upon us from behind. They are stealthy, insidious, assaulting us when we are unaware of their nearness. The tempter is cunning and shrewd. He does not meet us full-front. It is a comfort to know that Christ comes behind us when it is there we need the protection.

January 7.

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume. — ST. MATT. vi. 20.

SELF-DENYING economy in order to "lay up for a rainy day" is universally commended. By just so much more as the object is higher, is it commendable to economize in order to "lay up treasures in heaven." We really have only what we have used well for Christ. When one has learned this secret of banking in heaven, one has the true philosopher's stone which turns everything to gold. The simplest possessions are transformed into eternal things. A threadbare coat becomes a robe of righteousness, a last year's bonnet a crown of glory, when worn in self-denying economy for Christ's sake. We should live always for the highest and best things.

Look high, O soul! for what is earth but dust,
The fleeting shadow of the better things?
The heavens are thine, if thou wilt use thy wings,
And sighs are songs, if thou wilt only trust.

Aim high, O soul! for on the higher forms
Is always room, while lower ranks are filled;
Who climbs the heights finds all earth's noises stilled,
And a sweet calm and light above the storms.

Be high, O soul! scorn what is low and base;
"Child of a King" they call thee; be a king,
And troops of vassals will their tribute bring,
To crown thee heir of glory, child of grace.

HENRY BURTON.

January 8.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. — ST. JOHN XV. 14.

THERE is something very sweet in the thought that we may be Christ's friends, and that he opens all his heart to us. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." This means that if we are Christ's friends, he takes us into the closest intimacy. Not many of us realize all that is possible in the way of companionship with Christ. If we are on terms of unhindered friendship with him, we can indeed talk with him freely, intimately. as friend with friend.

"How does he talk with us?" some one asks. A heathen convert said, "When I pray, I talk to Christ; when I read my Bible, Christ speaks to me." If we live close to Christ, the words of Scripture are very plain to us; Christ himself indeed speaks to us in them.

There was a godly man in Germany, named Bengel, who was noted for his intimacy with Christ. A friend desired to watch the saintly man at his devotions. So he concealed himself one night in his room. Bengel sat long at his table reading his New Testament. The hours passed. At length the clock struck midnight, and the old man spread out his hands, and said with great joy, "Dear Lord Jesus, we are on the same old terms." Then closing his book he was soon in bed and asleep. He had learned the secret of friendship with Christ.

January 9.

Trade ye herewith till I come. — St. Luke xix. 13.

We are doing business in this world for Christ. Each one of us has something of his, a pound which he has intrusted to us to trade with as his agent. Our life itself, with all its powers, its endowments, its opportunities, its privileges, its blessings, its possibilities, is our pound. Our life is not our own. We are not in this world merely to have a good time for a few years. Life is a trust. We are not done with it either when we have lived it through to its last day. We must render an account of it to him who gave it to us. Our business is to gather gains through our trading with our Lord's money. We are required to make the most that is possible of our life.

People often speak of the solemnity of dying. It is a grave and serious matter, but it is a great deal more solemn thing to live. Dying is but giving back into God's hand his own gift, — life; and if we have lived well, dying is victory, glory, the trampling of life's opaque dome to fragments, as our soul bursts into real and full life and blessedness. It is living that is serious and solemn. Life to its last particle is our Lord's property, intrusted to us to be used so that it shall grow. Then comes the judgment. We shall have to look up into our Lord's face, and tell him what we have done with his pound. We shall be expected to return our trust, not only kept safe, but enhanced in value.

The first came before him, saying, Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more. — ST. LUKE xix. 16.

WE always find these ten-pound servants among the followers of Christ. They are those Christians who, from the very beginning, strive to reach the best things attainable in life through divine grace. They are not content with being merely saved from sin's guilt, with being mere members of the church. They make their consecration to Christ complete, keeping nothing back. They set their ideal of obedience to their Lord at the mark of perfectness, and slack not in their striving till they reach the mark in heaven. They seek to follow Christ wholly, fully, with their whole heart. They accept every duty without regard to its cost. They seek to be like Christ, imitating him in all the elements of his character. They give their whole energy to the work and service of Christ. They lie, like John, on the Master's bosom, and their souls are struck through, as it were, with the Master's loving spirit.

So these men and women grow at last into a saintliness, a spiritual beauty, and a power of usefulness and influence, by which they are set apart among Christians, shining with brighter lustre than other stars in the galaxy of the church. Their one pound has made ten pounds more. Their high spiritual attainment has been won by their diligent and wise use of the pound with which they began.

January 11.

Lord, thy pound, Lord, hath made five pounds. — ST. LUKE xix. 18.

CHRIST gives into no man's hand at the beginning of his life a finely trained, fully developed mind. The great poets and writers of the world began with only one pound. There was capacity for growth, but that was all. Christ gives to no one at the start a noble, full-statured, rich, transfigured Christian character, with spiritual graces all blossoming out. The most saintly Christians began with very little saintliness, very little spiritual power. The most useful men in the church began with a very small and imperfect sort of usefulness.

Those whose influence for good now touches thousands of lives, and extends over whole communities, or fills an entire country, had nothing to begin with but one little pound of capacity which the Master intrusted to them. This is the principle on which all our Lord's gifts are distributed. He puts into our hands a little at first; and as we use what we have, and gain experience, and show ability, and prove faithful to our trust, he adds more and more, giving us all we can use well, and as fast as we can use it.

"By thine own soul's law learn to live;
And, if men thwart thee, take no heed;
And, if men hate thee, have no care; —
Sing thou thy song, and do thy deed;
Hope thou thy hope, and pray thy prayer,
And claim no crown they will not give."

January 12.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint. — ISAIAH xl. 31.

THE source of strength in any life must be God. It is only when we are co-workers with him that we are unconquerable. If we would be strong, therefore, able to resist sin, able to do valiant battle for the truth, able to touch other lives with healing, uplifting influences, we must abide in Christ. Then his strength shall be in our heart and in our arm.

It is told of General Gordon, that each morning, during his journey in the Soudan country, for half an hour there lay outside his tent a white handkerchief. The whole camp knew well what it meant, and looked upon the little signal with the utmost respect; no foot dared cross the threshold of that tent while the little guard lay there. No message, however pressing, was to be delivered. Matters of life and death must wait until the white signal was taken away. Everybody in the camp knew that God and Gordon were communing together. Sweet is the communion of the spirit that obtains nearness to its God. Powerful is the influence of the soul that hourly longs to draw near to its God and drink in the inspiring draughts of his presence.

"Behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above his own."

Whosoever is fearful and trembling let him return.— JUDGES vii. 3.

THOUGH God wanted only a few men, he wanted the best. So the first thing was to weed out the incompetent. The army would be stronger with all these sent home than with them all hanging on. There were twenty thousand cowards; and the ten thousand brave men would be stronger alone than the thirty thousand, having the timid thousands among them.

Timidity is infectious. Many a church would be stronger if it were weeded out just as Gideon's army was. Its weakness lies in its great numbers, not because numbers necessarily weaken, but because there are so many half-hearted people on the roll. They have lost their interest, if they ever had any, and are indifferent, without thorough consecration. They add no strength, but only hinder the other members and dampen their zeal.

"This sword and shield were surely never given
To save my life alone in sin's fierce fight;
I dare not stand and see my comrades driven
Back in defeat, their columns rudely riven,
And strike no blow for God, their souls and right.

I dare not come to Jesus with my sighing,
To find in him eternal peace and rest,
And, unmoved, witness brothers round me dying,
And timid souls before sin's arrows flying,
And place no shield of faith above their breast."

And with every living creature that is with you. — GENESIS ix. 10.

IT is strange how God's care extends even to beasts. This covenant was not with man only, but with all the animal creation as well. Think of God making a covenant with the cattle that roam in the valleys, the sheep that graze in the meadows, the birds that fly in the air, and even with the insects that chirp in the fields. Yet that is what he did. We know, too, that this divine care is real. There are other promises which contain the same assurances.

> "He giveth to the beast his food,
> And to the young ravens which cry."

Then our Lord said, "Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap; which have no store-chamber nor barn; and God feedeth them." God cares for birds. There is a promise, too, for the flowers. "Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." Yet God clothes them, Jesus says.

> "In the thickest wild, in woodland bowers,
> By the wayside everywhere,
> The plainest flower of all the flowers
> Is shining with thy care."

Of course the lesson for us from all this is the one which Jesus taught. If God cares for the birds and flowers, how much more will he care for his own children! Therefore we ought to trust him without fear.

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. — GENESIS ix. 13.

THERE can be no rainbow unless it is raining. So we cannot see the brightest glory of God's grace without entering into the experiences of trial. We can learn the full preciousness of the divine promises only in the circumstances of need for which they were given.

A young friend told me that she had seen richer revealings of the love of Christ in the weeks she had been in her sick-room than in all the former years of her life. Words of God which she had known from childhood had flashed out then for the first time in the rich splendor of their meaning. There had been no clouds in her life before — all was health and happiness, and she had not seen the rainbow hues.

The same is true of all the divine comforts; we never can know the best of their meaning until the sorrow comes in which they are meant to give strength. A beatitude reads: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." We cannot receive the comfort until we mourn. Every Christian who has passed through sorrow understands this. In the deepening darkness the lights in the heavenly promises flashed out bright and clear, showing him for the first time the fulness of their blessed comfort.

January 16.

Be thou perfect. — GENESIS xvii. 1.

"PERFECTION is impossible," we are in the habit of saying; and therefore we do not try to reach perfection. It is better for us always to keep our aim high, although we cannot hope to reach it. If we have low ideals, our attainments will be low. We cannot look with approval upon anything lower than the perfect beauty of God himself, and not have the beauty of our own life dimmed thereby. We should always keep perfection before us as our aim. We should keep our eyes ever fixed upon the perfect model. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." We are always to seek to model our life upon the divine pattern.

Of course we cannot reach this lofty standard in a day, but the way to gain perfection is to strive toward it. When a child begins to write, his scrawling lines fall far short of the beauty of the copy at the top of the page. Book after book he fills with his uncouth chirography; but if he is diligent, each new page shows a little improvement, and by and by his writing rivals the copy. We can learn to live sweetly only in the same way. Begin where you can, no matter how imperfect or faulty your life, but strive ever toward perfection, and at last you shall be like Christ. That is the hope which shines before us — we shall see him as he is, and shall be like him.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things. — PSALM CIII. 3–5.

WHAT an enumeration of divine blessings this is! Any one of them is worth more than all earth's treasures combined. If we are not forgiven, we must rest forever under the burden of sin, a weight greater than all the Alps; but God forgives, forgives all our sins, and forgives fully and forever. If we are not healed, we must be sick forever, sick with the plague and leprosy of sin; but God heals, and heals all our diseases, heals completely. If we are not saved from the dangers of this world, we never can reach heaven; but God keeps, rescues, redeems, our life from all impending destructions.

Earth's crowns are made of thorns, and at the best are only what the children call play-crowns, for they are but of leaves that wither, or of gold and gems that will not last; but God crowns his people with crowns of lovingkindness and tender mercies, which are real and radiant, which shall never fade, but shall shine forever, becoming crowns of eternal life and glory in heaven. This world cannot satisfy a heart's cravings. Its possessions only make the hunger more intense; but God satisfies the souls of his people, meets all their cravings and hungers.

January 18.

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. — PSALM lv. 22.

THERE are some mistaken notions current concerning the ways in which God would help us. People think that whenever they have a little trouble, a bit of hard path to go over, a load to carry, a sorrow to endure, all they have to do is to call upon God, and he will at once take away their sorrow, or free them from the trouble. But this is not the way God helps us. His purpose of love concerning us is, not to make all things easy for us, but to make something of us.

When we pray God to save us from our care, to take the struggles out of our life, to make the paths mossy, to lift off every load, he will not do it. It would be most unloving in him to do so. We must carry the burden ourselves; all God promises is to sustain us as we carry it. He wants us to learn life's lessons, and to do this we must be left to work out the problems for ourselves. There are rich blessings which can be gotten only in sorrow. It would be short-sighted love indeed that would heed our cries, and spare us from sorrow, and thus deprive us of the wonderful blessings which can be gotten only in sorrow. God is too good to us to answer our prayers, which would save us from pain, cost, and sacrifice to-day, at the price of larger, better, truer life in the end. He would not rob us of the blessing that is in the burden, which we can get only by carrying it.

He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. — PSALM ciii. 14.

GOD does not treat us as if we were strong, holy, and unfallen. He does not forget that we are weak, that it is hard for us to live right, that we are easily tempted and overcome. He is very patient and gentle with us when we have sinned, binding up our wounds, restoring our soul. He does not lay upon us loads too great for us, for he knows how weak we are. He gives us help, too, with our burdens, that we need not faint under them.

We ought to get a great deal of comfort out of these words. You say you are so weak that you cannot resist temptation. Does not God know it? Will he not help you to overcome? You are weary through trouble or burden-bearing, but Gods knows all about it. You find your work hard, and cannot see how you are ever to get through with it; but God understands. He knows how frail you are; he remembers that you are only dust. He is pitiful, and gives always needed help.

Yet keep me ever in thy love,
Dear Father, watching from above,
And let me still thy mercy prove,
And care for me.

Oh, still in summer's golden glow,
Cast me not off from all my sin,
But make me pure and true within,
And teach me how thy smile to win,
Thy care for me.

MARIANNE FARNINGHAM.

January 20.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. — ST. MATTHEW xi. 29.

WE have to learn to live, if ever we live worthily. No one becomes a fine player on the piano without learning. No one can take a piece of canvas, with palette, paints, and brushes, and at once make a great picture.

Life itself is not easier than music or painting. We must learn to live; and the lessons are hard, requiring long years of patience and practice. But we ought to learn the lesson, whatever the cost may be.

Life is a sacred trust. We are accountable for it to God who gave it to us. We are required to make the most of our powers, training them to their best capacity; by self-discipline getting the perfect mastery of our being, then doing the things which we were made to do. Yet many people never seriously try to learn to live. This is unworthy a being endowed with immortality and sent forth on a divine errand. We should live in a way which will not shame us when we come to the end.

Man's life is but a working day,
 Whose tasks are set aright:
A time to work, a time to pray,
 And then a quiet night.
 And then, please God, a quiet night,
 Where palms are green and robes are white,
A long-drawn breath, a balm for sorrow, —
And all things lovely on the morrow.

CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

Whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be your servant. — ST. MATTHEW XX. 26, 27.

THERE are some people with a little measure of "position" who seem to accept all favors shown to them, and all services rendered to them by others, as due to them because of their exalted rank or their exceeding importance among men. They stand upon their dignity, and in effect demand attention and a degree of subserviency from their plain, ordinary fellow-men. They complain if by any accident they appear not to receive their due meed of honor. They seem to feel that their high place among men entitles them to a great deal of consideration, and they are hurt if they do not get it.

It would seem, however, in the light of our Lord's teaching, that the truly greatest among men are those who are most ready to serve. The spirit just described is scarcely, therefore, a mark of real greatness in Christ's eye, but a mark of littleness. All self-seeking is littleness. The law of service is taken from the very heart of God; nothing else is great.

The secret of life — it is giving;
To minister and to serve;
Love's law binds the man to the angel,
And ruin befalls if we swerve.
There are breadths of celestial horizons
Overhanging the commonest way;
The clod and the star share the glory,
And to breathe is an ecstasy.

LUCY LARCOM.

January 22.

Not to be ministered unto, but to minister. — ST. MATTHEW XX. 28.

THE art of photography is now so perfect that the whole side of a great newspaper can be taken in miniature so small as to be carried in a little pin or button, and yet every letter and point be perfect. So the whole life of Christ is photographed in one little phrase — "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." He came not to be served — if this had been his aim he would never have left heaven's glory, where he wanted nothing, where angels praised him and ministered unto him. He came to serve. He went about doing good. He altogether forgot himself. He served all he met who would receive his service. At last he gave his life in uttermost service — giving it a ransom for others. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

You say you want to be like Christ. You pray him to print his own image on your heart. Here, then is the image. It is no vague dream of perfection that we are to think of when we ask to be made like Christ. The old monks thought that they were in the way to become like Christ when they went into the wilderness, away from men, to live in cold cells or on tall columns. But that is not the thought which this picture suggests. "To minister" — that is the Christlike thing. Instead of fleeing away from the world we are to live among men, to serve them, to seek to bless them, to do them good, to give our life for them.

January 23.

No longer do I call you servants . . . I have called you friends. — ST. JOHN XV. 15.

IF we ask, "What is the best that Christ's friendship can be to any soul?" we may answer, "It is shelter, comfort, rest, inmost refreshment, guidance, and far more. Christ is an atmosphere about us, an atmosphere of love, warm with all tender influences, all healthful inspirations, all holy impulses. Christ as our friend comes into all our life, so really, so fully, that he becomes "an unconscious part of every true beat of our heart." As the summer sunbeams enter into the flowers, and reappear in their lovely hues and sweet fragrance, so does the very life of Christ enter into the lives of his friends, and permeate and transform them, until they become like him in spirit, in character, in disposition, in every feature.

We know what Christ's friendship was to his disciples. He found them rude, and left them refined. He found Matthew a publican, unjust, grasping, an outcast, and made him an apostle, then a writer of a Gospel. He found Peter profane, rough in manner, impetuous, and made him an eloquent preacher, a man of marvellous power, whose influence lives to-day wherever the Christian church has gone. He found John a son of thunder, with strong, fiery resentments, and made him the apostle of love, the human embodiment of all the sweet, gentle, tender graces of his own life. The same the friendship of Christ can do for us.

January 24.

Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. — ST. LUKE x. 28.

THAT is just the trouble with a great many people. They can answer right. They know all about their duty. They can repeat with glib tongue text after text of Scripture. They can recite catechism and creed without missing a word, and like to boast of their thorough familiarity with these sacred formularies. But it is the doing that troubles them. They know the commandments, but they fail to keep them. They can quote any number of texts about honesty and truthfulness, yet they are neither honest nor truthful. They like to talk about the love of Christ, which is meek, gentle, patient, and compassionate, but they do not think of getting any of this spirit into their own life. They recite texts about sending the gospel to the heathen, and make addresses about saving the lost, but neither give money nor make any personal effort to save others. If doing were as easy as knowing, how good we should all be! Would it not be a beautiful thing for us to try to live all the duty we know?

Be what thou seemest; live thy creed;
Hold up to earth the torch divine;
Be what thou prayest to be made;
Let the great Master's step be thine.

Sow love, and taste its fruitage pure;
Sow peace, and reap its harvest bright;
Sow sunbeams on the rock and moor,
And find a harvest-home of light.

BONAR.

I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you. — St. John xv. 15.

ONE of the marks of a noble nature is open-heartedness. Jesus gave it as the chief privilege of friendship with him that he would make known to his friends all that his Father had told him. That is, full, trusting confidence is the deepest, truest thing in the highest and best possible friendship. Soul and soul should be thoroughly united in two friends.

Two gentlemen lived in houses adjoining each other. Their back yards were separated by a fence. A warm friendship grew up between the two families; and soon that fence came down, and the children played together alike in both yards. True friendship pulls down the fences between lives.

Therefore a secretive man can never be a friend, nor have a friend at more than a few points. He is afraid to let his friend know what he knows, what he has been doing, what he is intending to do. Secretiveness is narrow, hindering, cramping. It is like living in a cell. It robs one's own life of sweet blessings which it might get from others, and it robs others of pleasures and benefits which it might give to them. The secretive man has not yet learned the meaning of the sweet word about the open-heartedness of the Master toward his friends, which he would have them repeat toward other Christians.

January 26.

Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. — EPHESIANS iii. 20.

GOD often does better for us than we ask. We go to him with our little requests. We are in want, and ask for temporal relief. We are suffering, and ask that our pain may cease. We are poor, and ask him for more money. We are just like the beggar, holding out our hands for paltry alms to eke out the day's need. Then God looks down upon us and says, "My child, are these little trifles all you want me to give to you, — daily bread, raiment, fuel for your fire, medicine for your sickness, comfort for your grief, the small things to supply your common needs, — are these the only gifts and blessings you want and ask from the hand of your heavenly Father, who has infinite treasures to give to you?"

Yet thousands never get beyond just such requests in their praying. Bowing daily before a God of infinite power and love, in whose hands are unsearchable riches, they never ask for anything but passing earthly comforts and good things. They ask only for things for their bodies, or to beautify their homes, making no requests for the heavenly and spiritual gifts God has for their souls. We should learn to ask for the best things in all God's power to give. We should not be content to seek even what we ourselves can choose, but should ask God to choose for us, and to give us *his* best things.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom. — PROVERBS iii. 13.

IT is worth our while to study what the Bible says about happiness and how to get it. Most people want to be happy, but there are many who miss the mark.

Yet those who follow the Bible rules for happiness will never be disappointed. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom." Wisdom is a large word. It is not merely knowledge. A man may know so much that he is a walking encyclopædia, and yet not be happy. He may pursue knowledge into all its nooks and hiding-places, dig it out of the rocks, extract it from the minerals, gather it from flower and plant, draw it down from among the stars, and yet not find happiness. Knowing a great many things does not make one wise.

Wisdom is knowledge applied to life. He has found wisdom who has learned to live well. To live well is to live according to God's laws, which are summed up in one word love — love to God and love to man. No one is happy who does not recognize God and do his will. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." No one can be really happy who does not love his fellow-men. Happiness never is found in selfishness. Those who seek it in thinking, toiling, and striving only for themselves will have a vain quest. It never lies that way. He only has found wisdom who has found rest in Christ.

January 28.

The angel of God . . . went before the camp of Israel. — EXODUS xiv. 19.

THIS angel was revealed in the form of cloud and fire. It was wonderful guidance which God gave to his people in their marches. By day the pillar of cloud sheltered them, and then by night the same cloud was light. By day it was shelter, by night it was light. And always it was guidance. When they were to move, it lifted and went in advance, to lead them. When they were to halt and rest, it settled down, thus giving them the signal to pitch their tents.

This was miraculous guidance; but we have God's presence just as really, though without a visible pillar to lead us. God guides his people by his word, by his providence, by his Spirit. If we are willing to follow unquestioningly, we shall never be left long in perplexity as to the way we should take. Our guidance is given to us only as we will accept it and shape our course by it.

Nor is the guidance given in maps and charts, showing us miles and miles of the road; it is given only step by step as we go on. "Order my steps" is a Bible prayer, and we sing: —

"Lead, kindly Light! amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead thou me on;
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

When the soles of the feet of the priests . . . shall rest in the waters . . . the waters . . . shall be cut off. — JOSHUA iii. 13.

THERE must be faith first. The priests must take up the ark and walk with it down into the flowing stream before the waters would be cut off. They did not see a path across the river before they started. They broke up their camps and began their march while there was no sign of any crossing-place. If they had walked down to the edge, and then stopped to wait for the path to be opened, it would not have been opened. If they had lifted their feet and held them over the water, waiting for its flow to cease, they would have waited in vain. They must take one step into the water before the current would be cut off. They must move on as if the way were open, believing that it would be open.

We must learn to take God at his word and go forward in duty, though we see no way by which we can go forward. The reason we are so often balked by difficulties is because we expect to see them removed before we venture to pass through them. If we would move right on in faith, as soon as our feet touch the brim the waters would flow away and leave a path. A great many people stand on the edge of the Christian life, waiting for feelings, before they will begin to follow Christ. If they would but begin to follow him, the way would open before them.

January 30.

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.— ST. JOHN i. 3.

WE like to look at a beautiful piece of workmanship, and remember that some loved friend of ours fashioned it. This makes it more precious and sacred.

Some orphan children had been received into an institution, and were exchanging their old garments for new ones. One poor boy was seen picking up the wretched cap he had been wearing, and tearing out of it a piece of faded silk that had been sewed into it. He was asked why he wanted to keep the patch; and he said, his eyes full of tears, that his mother had sewed it into his old cap with her thin white fingers when she was on her death-bed, and he wanted to keep it in remembrance of her.

Men prize old paintings, and pay large prices for them, because they were painted by some famous master. All the works of nature would be sacred to us, if we but remembered that our Saviour made them. The sweet flowers in the field would be all the sweeter, if we only thought as we look upon them, "The hands of Christ painted them."

The Lord is in his holy place
In all things near and far;
Shekinah of the snowflake he,
And glory of the star;
And secret of the April-land
That stirs the field to flowers,
Whose little tabernacles rise
To hold him through the hours.

WILLIAM C. GANNETT.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. — ST. JOHN i. 4.

LIFE is a mystery. We can note its manifestations, but we cannot find its source. We see that a man lives — we see it in his actions; but we cannot tell what it is that keeps the heart beating, beating, beating, without pause, for sixty, seventy, years. We can read the poet's lines, and look at the artist's pictures, and hear the musician's songs; but what do we know of the inner mental life that produced the poem, the pictures, the songs? It is hidden life.

So spiritual life is hidden. We see one supported in quiet peace, amid great trial; another comforted into sweet acquiescence in a bitter sorrow; another living purely and nobly amid sore temptations; another lifted up out of degradation, and transformed. We cannot understand the processes; we see only the effects. So all life is mysterious.

But we know that it all comes from Christ. He is the fountain of all life. No human genius, skill, or power has ever been able to produce life of any kind, even a living blade of grass or a little violet. Still less can any human power give new life to a dead soul. Only Christ can do this. We must get our life from him.

"Teach me to live and find my life in thee,
Looking from earth and earthly things away;
Let me not falter, but untiringly
Press on, and gain new strength and power each day."

February 1.

And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood. — GENESIS ix. 11.

SCIENCE now explains so many things which devout people in the past loved to look upon as the very acts of God, that some have begun to wonder whether after all our Father really has anything to do with nature. But what is nature? It is God's handiwork. The powers that work so mightily in earth and air, God put there. Can these powers be greater than he who lodged them in his works? We need never fear that any scientific discovery shall show us a universe without a God. We know, too, that the God who controls all the forces and energies of nature, holding all in his hands, is our Father.

During a great freshet, when houses, barns, outbuildings, and fences were swept away in the wild current, some men in a skiff saw a baby's cradle borne along in the stream. Rowing to it, they found in it, sleeping as quietly and sweetly as it had ever slept in its mother's bosom, a little baby. So, in the wildest floods of earth, God cares for his little ones. He is Lord of all the forces of nature. Not a drop of water, even in angriest billows, ever breaks away from the control of God. Natural law! — Yes, but natural law is only the leash of divine control which is held firmly in the hand of God. No wild tempest ever sweeps beyond the "Hitherto" of our Father.

February 2.

When I bring a cloud over the earth . . . the bow shall be seen in the cloud. — GENESIS ix. 14.

SO always, too, in spiritual life, whenever a cloud is in the sky the rainbow appears on the cloud, the rainbow of divine promise, of God's love and grace. We are accustomed to say that every cloud has a silver lining, and the saying is true. In other words, every dark providence has a bright, shining side. As God sees it, there is a blessing in it. It is not always true that we can see the rainbow on the cloud; sometimes we can see only gloom and shadow. But faith can always be sure of good in every trial, in every sorrow, in every loss, even when the natural eye cannot see it. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

Some day we shall know that many of our best blessings have come to us out of our sorrows. In the Book of Revelation we are told that there is a rainbow about the throne of God and the Lamb in heaven, which would seem to be a suggestion that God's covenant is not for earth only, but also reaches forward into the blessed life beyond. Perhaps our richest blessings in heaven will be from earth's sorrows.

Lord, I had chosen another lot,
But then I had not chosen well;
Thy choice and only thine is good;
No different lot, search heaven and hell,
Had blessed me, fully understood;
None other which thou orderest not.

CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

February 3.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! — ROMANS xi. 33.

OUR knowledge is limited. We see only little fragments of truth. We are like children on the shore of the sea, gathering a few pebbles and shells, while the ocean's depths are hidden from us. Says Zophar: —

> Canst thou by searching find out God?
> Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?
> It is high as heaven; what canst thou do?
> Deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know?

Job himself, speaking of God's works in nature and in providence, adds: —

> Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways;
> And how small a whisper do we hear of him?
> But the thunder of his power who can understand?

We ought to learn the lesson. God is not a man — one of ourselves. If we could understand him, he would not be God. His greatness puts him beyond our comprehension. We cannot hope to know the reasons for his acts. Some of his ways with us are strange ways. We are perplexed; we say, "God cannot love me or he would not do these things." We should learn to trust God even in the deepest mysteries, not expecting to understand, but sure of his love and goodness even when it is darkest and when his face is veiled in most impenetrable mists. We should be silent unto God when we cannot understand. That is the truest faith.

February 4.

He answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. — 2 KINGS vi. 16.

IT is not enough just to put on a bold face and compel ourselves to be brave or appear brave. It will not do merely to try to make ourselves think there is no danger, when we know very well that there is danger. We cannot play tricks on ourselves. The true secret of confidence and fearlessness in danger is faith in the divine keeping, not in thinking there is no peril. "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

The great truth to be learned by all who would acquire true moral courage is the reality of God's care for his people in all their dangers. The ninetieth and the one hundred and twenty-first psalms describe this care. "The Lord is thy keeper." "The Lord shall keep thee from all evil." "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." I have slept in a camp with armed enemies on all sides; but I was not afraid, for I knew that waking sentinels formed a complete circle all around the camp. So in any danger we may feel safe because God wakes and watches.

Then shall thy tossing soul find anchorage
And steadfast peace;
Thy love shall rest on his; thy weary doubts
Forever cease;
Thy heart shall find in him, and in his grace,
Its rest and bliss.

BONAR.

February 5.

Go now, see whether it be well with thy brethren. — GENESIS xxxvii. 14.

JOSEPH left his home in good spirits. We can imagine his good-by as he set out. The family would see him off, expecting him to fare well and to return again in good time. Not one of them dreamed that it would be twenty years before they should see his face again. If they had imagined this, then their parting that morning would have been very tender.

We never know when we say farewell at our door to the friends we love, as they or we go out for a time, that we shall ever see them again. We should always say good-by, even for the briefest parting, with thoughtfulness and with love's warmth, for we may never clasp hands with them any more. Coventry Patmore writes: —

If thou dost bid thy friend farewell,
But for one night though that farewell may be,
Press thou his hand in thine.
How canst thou tell how far from thee
Fate or caprice may lead his steps ere that to-morrow comes?
Men have been known lightly to turn the corner of a street,
And days have grown to months,
And months to lagging years, ere they
Have looked in loving eyes again.
Parting at best is underlaid
With tears and pain;
Therefore, lest sudden death should come between,
Or time, or distance, clasp with pressure firm the hand
Of him who goeth forth:
Unseen, fate goeth too.

He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. ST. LUKE xiv. 11.

HUMILITY is an excellent grace. It is the empty hand which God fills. Self-conceit is weakness. We are strongest when we distrust ourselves, and are thus led to lean upon God. Emptiness is the cup into which God puts blessing. Faith is simply letting God work in us and with us. Pride leaves no room for the divine strength.

But there is a danger also in self-distrust. It sometimes makes a person shrink from duty. It almost wrecked the mission of Moses. A little more excusing of himself, and God probably would have left him with his sheep in the wilderness, seeking some other man to bring Israel out of Egypt. No doubt many persons have failed altogether of the mission for which they were sent into this world through a like feeling of unfitness for the work. When God clearly calls us to undertake any task, we should never raise the question of ability. He would not call us to it if we could not do it.

If we bravely resolve to do our part,
And bear our griefs with a patient heart
And free from all repining,
We shall be led to a higher way,
To a better work than we do to-day,
And find love's sunlight shining;
For truth of spirit and strength of soul
Will make the darkest cloud unroll,
And show its silver lining.

HELEN KEITH.

February 7.

In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. — ST. JOHN xvi. 33.

THE word tribulation is very suggestive. It comes from a root which means a flail. The thresher uses the flail to beat the wheat sheaves that he may separate the golden wheat from the chaff and straw.

Tribulation is God's threshing — not to destroy us, but to get what is good, heavenly, and spiritual in us separated from what is wrong, earthly, and fleshly. Nothing less than blows of pain will do this. The evil clings so to the good, the golden wheat of goodness in us is so wrapped up in the strong chaff of the old life, that only the heavy flail of suffering can produce the separation.

Suffering is like John Baptist, wearing grim garments, with stern visage and rough hands and a baptism of bitter tears, uttering sharp, harsh words, going before Christ to prepare us for his gentle coming and his message of love. Many of us would never enter the gates of pearl were it not for this unwelcome messenger, pain.

Though the rain may fall and the wind be blowing,
And cold and chill is the wintry blast;
Though the cloudy sky is still cloudier growing,
And the dead leaves tell that summer has passed;
My face I hold to the stormy heaven,
My heart is as calm as the summer sea,
Glad to receive what my God has given,
Whate'er it be.

E. N. TAYLOR.

February 8.

Which is your reasonable service. — ROMANS xii. 1.

A CHRISTIAN man had quoted this verse, urging those whom he had addressed to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice. When he closed, a good Friend who sat beside him said, "Friend John, the next time thee quotes that verse, thee would better quote all of it."

"Didn't I quote it all?"

"No; thee left off the last words — 'which is your reasonable service.' That is very important."

The old Quaker was right. We would better quote the whole verse. It is not an unreasonable thing that God asks us to do when he beseeches us to present ourselves to him as a living sacrifice. He is our Father, and we are his children; is it unreasonable that a child shall be asked to do a father's will? We may think of our redemption, and remember at what tremendous cost Christ bought us, and then of all the blessings and hopes that are ours through his sacrifice for us. Is it unreasonable that we should be asked to consecrate our lives to God when he has done such things for us? We may think, too, of what will be the result if we do not yield ourselves to God — that our lives will be lost in sin's darkness; and of the good that will come to us through devoting ourselves to him — eternal life and blessedness. Is it, then, unreasonable that we should be called to make this presentation of ourselves to God?

February 9.

Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots. — EXODUS xvi. 3.

IT is a sad thing when we allow life's disappointments to make us despondent. The problem of Christian living in this world is not to escape experiences of hardship, but to retain sweetness of spirit in all such experiences. When the snows melted away after the long winter, a little plant was seen looking up into the warm, blue sky, as fresh, tender, and full of life, as if it had passed the cold months in a conservatory. Under the great drifts it had hidden, cosey and warm, and was ready at the first coming of spring to burst into the full vigor of fragrant life.

That is a picture of the way every Christian life should pass through the sorest winter of adversity. That is not the way many people do endure. You must sometimes go from the cool shade and gurgling waters of Elim out into the hot desert. You must have hardships, losses, sorrows. But see to it that you retain through all these a heart gentle as a little child's, and full of trust and hope. Then when the winter is past and the spring comes, as spring always does come after the longest winter, you will emerge unharmed, with even richer life, tenderer beauty, and deeper joy. The secret of such victorious living is a trust in God that never fails.

February 10

She hath done what she could. — ST. MARK xiv. 8.

A CHILD offered a teacher a handful of weeds and grasses, wilted and soiled, and said, "Here is a bouquet for you." The teacher saw the love in the child's eyes, and accepted the gift with sincere gratitude. So it is that Christ accepts our homeliest gifts or services, if he sees love in our heart.

There is a story of a poor Arab, who came to a spring of pure water in the desert, and filled his leather bottle to carry it to the caliph. The caliph received the gift, and, pouring some of the water into a cup, drank it, thanking the Arab and rewarding him. The courtiers pressed forward, eager to taste the water, but the caliph forbade them. When the Arab had departed, the caliph told his courtiers why he had forbidden them to taste the water. In the long journey it had become distasteful. He knew that if any of the men should taste it they would show their disgust, and thus hurt the poor man's feelings. The Arab had brought his present all the long journey, with great toil and care, and because he loved the caliph. He did not know the water had become unwholesome, and the caliph wished him to have his pleasure unmarred.

This illustrates the spirit with which Christ receives the gifts and services of those who love him. The gifts may be worthless, and the services may avail nothing, but for the love that prompts them, he accepts them with real gladness, and richly rewards them.

And brought that which they had spun. — EXODUS XXXV. 25.

MANY young ladies make beautiful things, but do not bring them to Christ. They keep them for their own adornment. But these women brought their fine handiwork to the Lord. They spun beautiful threads to be woven into the curtains and embroideries of the tabernacle. Christian girls and women may help in many ways in preparing dwelling-places for God. They can make a place for him in their own heart. They can put touches of beauty into the lives of others. It needs not great things, but only service of truth filled with love, to please God. The threads may be coarse, but in God's eye they will be beautiful if love spins them.

It is not the deed we do,
Though the deed be never so fair,
But the love that the dear Lord looketh for,
Hidden with lowly care
In the heart of the deed so fair.

The love is the priceless thing,
The treasure our treasures must hold,
Or ever the Lord will take the gift,
Or tell the worth of the gold
By the love that cannot be told.

Behold us, the rich and the poor,
Dear Lord, in thy service draw near;
One consecrateth a precious coin,
One droppeth only a tear;
Look, Master, the love is here!

CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

February 12.

That I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. — EXODUS xvi. 4.

EVERYTHING God gives or sends to us proves us in some way. Trials prove us, whether we will submit with humility and patience to the experiences that are sore and painful, and learn the lesson set for us in them. But none the less do the favors of life prove us. They test our gratitude. Do we remember God all the time as the Giver of each new blessing? They test our faith. Do we still lean on him while we have plenty? Oftentimes the trust that turns to him when help is needed, fails to look to him when the hand is full. They also test our obedience. Sometimes when our wants are all supplied we forget our obligation to serve God. Thus every day is a probation. We are always on trial.

"We are weaving every day, as we pass along our way,
Intent upon our busy work, or just as busy play,
Beneath the casual gaze of men, the angels' steady eyes,
The robes of resurrection in which we shall arise.

Then the threads we sadly spun, and in darkness one by one
Wove in the fabric, wishing that the long, hard task was done,
Shall gleam and glimmer as a mist of lovely rose and blue,
And the blacker threads of sorrow shall be made lovely too.

The glimmering glints of gold from a patience manifold
Shall make a pattern sweet and strange, and beauteous to behold;
And the white of purity shall shine, the tear spots fade away,
As we don our resurrection robes upon that last great day."

February 13.

Stand still, that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord. — I SAMUEL xii. 7.

IT is good to stand still sometimes, and look back over the way by which God has led us. Of one thing we may always be sure — all God's dealings with us are right. Some of them may seem hard. We all have our trials, disappointments, sorrows, sufferings, our cups of bitterness. There is no way in which we can see goodness in all these experiences, save by faith in the unfailing righteousness of God. Yet a firm conviction of this truth brings peace in the darkest hour. God cannot be unloving. He is our Father.

"I see the wrong that round me lies,
I feel the guilt within;
I hear with groans and travail-cries
The world confess its sin.
Yet, in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed truth my spirit clings —
I know that God is good."

It does us good to stand before God at times, and look back over our life, and see all our experiences in the light of the love that streams from his face. We cannot understand — all seems strange and dark; yet we know God is righteous, and righteousness is goodness. If we firmly believe this all through life, whatever may come, faith will live, and its light will shine as a bright star in the blackest midnight.

February 14.

Thou art my hiding place. — PSALM xxxii. 7.

GOD is a hiding-place from all sorts of dangers. He is a hiding-place from sin. His mercy is an eternal refuge. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

God is a refuge from trouble. "God had one Son without sin, but he has none without sorrow." Where shall we go to get away from sorrow? There is no place on earth into which it never enters, no Eden bower, no Paradise, where grief never comes. But there is a hiding-place to which sorrowing ones can flee, and where they will find comfort that shall give them peace. "In the world ye shall have tribulations;" "in me ye shall have peace," said Jesus. The sorrow may not be shut out, but the divine peace comes into the heart and calms it. Sorrow is seen then as God's messenger of love, sent by him on some good errand, and is accepted in faith. So in the pain and loss there is no more fear. The sufferer has found a hiding-place in God.

God is a hiding-place from danger. In the wildest terrors and alarms we can run to him, and, lying down in his bosom, be safe. A Christian sailor said that even if his ship went down into the sea he would be safe; for God holds the waters in the hollow of his hand, and he would only fall into his Father's hand.

"Death's cold wave need not affright us
When we know that he has died,
When we see the face of Jesus
Smiling on the other side."

February 15.

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. — LAMENTATIONS iii. 22, 23.

IT is the glory of God's love that it is always fresh and new. It is never the same in its expression any two days. We have to patch up our old things and keep them, using them again and again; but God never does. He never gives us the old leaves a second time; each spring every tree gets new foliage, new garments of beauty. He does not revive last year's withered flowers, and give them to us again for this year; he gives us new flowers for each summer.

So he does with his messages of love — they are not repeated over and over again, always the same old ones. Every time the reverent heart reads the Bible, its words come fresh from the lips of God, always new. They never get old. They are like the water that bubbles up in living streams from the depths in the wayside spring, always fresh, sweet, and new.

So it is with the blessings of prayer. Morning by morning we kneel before God, seeking his benediction and favor. He does not give us always the same blessing, but has a new one ready for each new day. Our needs are not the same any two mornings when we bow before him, and he always suits the blessing to the need. We are taught to live day by day. God's goodness comes to us new every morning.

The king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land. — 2 SAMUEL v. 6.

THE Jebusites still held a hill-top in the heart of the country, never having been dislodged. There are Jebusites in every Christian community, and also in every Christian heart. For example, there is worldliness, which has its Jebusites everywhere. In the midst of a community containing its beautiful Christian homes, sanctuaries, and refinements, one finds a licensed drinking-saloon. It is so intrenched there, too, that it seems impossible to dislodge it. There are many other such citadels of evil, which rear their proud towers and defy conquest.

In every heart, too, there are little Jebusite hills, which it long seems impossible for good to conquer. Sometimes it is a secret sin which lives on amid the general holiness of a life, refusing to submit to the sway of the grace of God. Sometimes it is a remnant of the old nature, — pride, wilfulness, weakness, selfishness, or bitterness. "We all have our faults," we confess with penitence, and under this veil we manage to tuck away a large number of dear idols that we do not want to give up. We ought to give attention to these unsubdued parts of our life, that every thought, feeling, and temper may be brought into subjection to Christ. It is perilous to leave even one such unconquered stronghold in our heart. It may cost us dearly in the end.

This he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. — ST. JOHN vi. 6.

JESUS is continually proving his disciples, putting them to the test to draw out their faith. He is constantly bringing before us cases of need, sorrow, and trial, to prove us. He wants to draw out our love, our sympathy, our tenderness, and train us to do the works of love which he leaves us in this world to do.

The disciples thought they could not feed the multitude before them, yet Jesus meant that they should do it. Their little, blessed and then used, proved quite enough. We think we cannot answer the needs, sorrows, and hungers that appeal to us; but we can if we will. Christ wants us to go forth to minister in his name to all whom he sends to us. We do not appear to be able to do much. But even our few words spoken kindly, our tears of sympathy, our expressions of love, Christ can use to do great good to the faint and the weary hearts before us. We must never say of any appeals that come to us, "We cannot do anything." To our word of powerlessness, when we have a bidding of duty, Jesus only answers, "Give ye them to eat;" and we must go out to feed them though we seem to have only a crumb or a crust to give.

Then arise, and seek to follow
Where the voice of duty leads;
Give thyself to works of mercy,
Loving thoughts, and kindly deeds.

C. A. MEANS.

Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost. — ST. JOHN vi. 12.

"WASTE not, want not," says the proverb. It seems remarkable that he who so easily could multiply the five loaves into an abundant meal for thousands should be so particular about saving the fragments. But he would teach us economy. No matter how great our abundance, we should take care of the fragments. After we have fed at our tables, there are hungry people who would be glad of the pieces that are left.

This applies also to the fragments of time. Many busy people waste whole years of time in their life, in the minutes which they lose every day. If at the end of a year they could gather up all these fragments, they would have many basketfuls of golden time in which they might do much good.

So of our strength: many persons waste their bodily energy, using it in sport, or play, or useless exercise, when it belongs to God, and ought to be employed to its last particle for his glory. We should not waste our affections by allowing them to be given to unworthy objects or persons. There is no limit to the application of this principle. We must give account of everything we have, even the minutes of time, the little fractions of strength, and the smallest bits of bread on our tables.

"A single word is a little thing,
But a soul may be dying before your eyes
For the lack of the comfort a word may bring,
With its welcome help and its sweet surprise."

Jesus took the loaves; and . . . distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down. — St. John vi. 11.

CHRIST himself wrought the miracle, but he did it through his disciples. That is his usual way. When he wants to take care of a little baby, and train it for a worthy mission, he puts a portion of his own love and gentleness into a mother's heart, and commissions her to train the child for him.

When he wanted to give his word to the world, he did not speak directly from heaven, but put the thoughts into the lips of holy men to speak them for him. When he wants now to send his grace to a sinner, he does not command an angel from his throne, nor come himself in form of majesty, but sends the message through a saved one.

The disciples that day stood between Christ and the multitude, and so Christ's disciples always do. If they had merely eaten of the bread themselves, and had not passed it to the hungry multitude, the people would have starved, though provision was in the disciples' hands, enough to feed them all. If we who have the gospel bread only feed ourselves with it, and do not carry it to perishing sinners, they will die in their sins — not because there is no salvation for them, but because we have not taken the salvation to them.

"Then only we live,
When we feed one another, as we have been fed."

February 20.

Lord, evermore give us this bread. — St. John vi. 34.

THAT was a good prayer. It is just the prayer for each one of us, every day. But the people who made it first did not know what they were asking.

It is often so in our praying. We have a dim, glimmering vision of something very beautiful, but it is only a shadowy vision to us. The thing we think we want is not the thing at all that God had in mind in his promise. He meant something most worthy, but we have in our mind the thought of something material and earthly. It is well that we have an Intercessor into whose hands all our requests must pass, who will take our poor, mistaken prayers and interpret them aright for us, giving us, not what we thought we would get, but something better, diviner.

Abraham sought all his life for a country which he never received. But he got something better in his unavailing search — his faith was growing all the while; his thoughts and hopes were turned to spiritual things, of which the earthly possessions he sought were only shadows. So it is in the disappointments of our praying: what we seek we find not, but meanwhile we are getting blessings a thousand times better. On weary paths of earth where we toil in search of supposed blessings, we are really rising step by step on invisible stairs, and reaching blessings of which the earthly illusions were only pictures.

He still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. —Job ii. 3.

IT is a noble thing when a man stands steadfast and faithful to God in the midst of trials and adversities. Such a man is like a mighty rock under the beatings of the angry waves of the sea.

Thus Job stood. Trial after trial came. His property was swept away by marauders and by fire, and his children were crushed by falling walls, until in a little while he was stripped of all he had, and left a childless man. His heart was broken with sorrow, but his faith failed not. The Lord kept his eye upon his servant, and was pleased to see how trustingly he endured his losses and sorrows.

The affliction of Job, as described here from the divine side, suggests to us what may ofttimes be the reason for trouble in the lives of God's children. Job suffered in order to prove to a scoffing adversary the genuineness of his religion. Job did not know why these sore losses came upon him. We do not know, when we are in trouble, why God sends or permits the affliction. But we should always bear ourselves so as to honor God, and prove the reality and sincerity of our faith. We are set to witness to the power of divine grace in trial, and should not fail God nor disappoint him. No duty of ours is more sacred than being true to God in pain and trouble. To murmur or complain is to sin.

What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? — JOB ii. 10.

TOO often weak faith is moved from its steadfastness by trials. People say, "God cannot love me, or he would not send this affliction upon me." Job's answer, however, shows nobler faith. We take good, earthly good, from God's hands. We believe that God loves us so long as he showers upon us favors, and gives us pleasant things, joys and prosperities. Very well; when he changes the form of his providence, and gives us troubles instead of favors, should we conclude that he no longer loves us?

In the case of the change in his treatment of Job, we are permitted to look within the heart of God, to learn what his feelings were, and we see that he had never loved his servant more than when he was allowing him to suffer so sorely. At the close of the first trial, Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." The same Lord that gave, took away; yes, and the same love. God knows best what we need any particular day, and what will most advance the kingdom of Christ; and we ought to trust him so implicitly, so unquestioningly, that whether he gives a new favor or takes one away; whether he grants us our request or withholds it; whether he bestows upon us earthly good or causes us to suffer loss and adversity — we shall still believe and say, "God loves me, and he is blessing me."

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth. — JOB v. 17.

HE is not happy at the time. No one enjoys having troubles, sufferings, sorrows. Therefore this word appears very strange to some people. They cannot understand it. It is contrary to all their thoughts of happiness. Of course, the word happy is not used here in the world's sense. Happiness is the pleasure that comes from the things that happen. It depends on personal comfort, on prosperous circumstances, on kindly and congenial conditions. When these are taken away the happiness is destroyed.

But the word here means blessed; and the statement is, that blessing comes to him who receives God's correction. To correct is to set right that which has been wrong. Surely if a man is going in the wrong way, and God turns his feet back and sets him in the right way, a blessing has come to him. Afflictions are God's corrections. They come with a purpose of love in them. They are hard to accept, but afterward the blessing is revealed.

For life seems so little when life is past,
And the memories of sorrow fleet so fast,
And the woes which were bitter to you and to me
Shall vanish as raindrops which fall in the sea;
And all that has hurt us shall be made good,
And the puzzles which hindered be understood,
And the long, hard march through the wilderness bare
Seem but a day's journey when once we are there.

SUSAN COOLIDGE.

February 24.

I know that thou canst do all things,
And that no purpose of thine can be restrained.
JOB xlii. 2.

WE cannot do what we would. Many of our purposes are restrained. We desire to do good and beautiful things, and we try, but our achievements fall far below our thought. Our clumsy hands cannot fashion the loveliness our hearts dream. Our faltering weakness cannot do the brave things our souls aspire to do. No artist ever paints on his canvas all the beauty of his ideal. No singer ever expresses all the music that burns within him as he sings. No eloquent orator ever utters all that he feels as he pleads for truth or for justice.

So in all our life we do only a little of what we strive to do. We set out in the morning with purposes of usefulness, of true living, of gentle-heartedness, of patience, of victoriousness; but in the evening we find only little fragments of these good intentions wrought out.

But God's intentions are all carried out. No power can withstand him or balk his will. It was in this thought that Job found peace in his long, sore trial. All things were in God's hands, and nothing could hinder his designs of love. Our God is infinitely strong. In all earthly confusions, strifes, and troubles, his hand moves, bringing good out of evil for those who trust in him. He can execute all his purposes of good. He is never hindered in blessing his children.

February 25.

I would order my cause before him. — JOB xxiii. 4.

JOB had confidence that God was his Friend, and that if he could stand before him and tell him all about his life, it would be well with him. Every Christian may have the same confidence. This does not mean that we have no sins, and that we can appear in God's presence and explain our acts to him and show him that we have done nothing wrong. We are sinners, and we can come before him only with penitence and confession. But when we come thus, and cast ourselves on his love and mercy, we may order our cause before him without fear, not pleading innocence, but pleading the grace of Christ. We know that God is pitiful toward our infirmities. Knowing all about us, he yet loves us with a love that is infinitely gracious.

> "Like as a father pitieth his children,
> So the Lord pitieth them that fear him.
> For he knoweth our frame;
> He remembereth that we are dust."

A still sweeter truth than that which is uttered here is that we have One who can order our cause before God, and who will always find acceptance for us. "If any one sin," said the beloved disciple, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." We may go to God always in his name, sure that in his hands all our interests will be safe, for he ever liveth to make intercession. Our cause will never suffer in the hands of him who died for us.

Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? Nay; but he would give heed unto me. — JOB xxiii. 6.

JOB was sure that if he could only get to God he would find in him a friend. He had been learning more and more of God's real nature, and had at least some thought of the true character of the mighty God. Especially does he seem to have gotten some glimpses of the divine Redeemer who was his Friend. Thus a few chapters back he says: —

> "I know that my Redeemer liveth:
> That he shall stand, survivor over the dust;
> And after my skin is gone, they will rend this body,
> And I, from my flesh, shall see God:
> Whom I shall see, I, for myself,
> And mine eyes shall behold, a stranger no more."

Just how much Job really did know of the character of God we cannot tell. He certainly believed now that if he could come before God he would meet a friend. We live in full gospel light, and we know that God is our truest and best friend; that he is our Father; that we need never fear to make an appeal to him. He is not against us. His almighty power is not used to oppose us, to break us and crush us. He gives heed unto our cry. He loves us. All his omnipotence is on our side. No mother's heart was ever so full of love for her child as is the heart of God for us, his children. We know that God's thoughts toward us are kindly — thoughts of peace.

He hideth himself . . . that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way that I take. — JOB xxiii. 9, 10.

GOD is invisible, and we cannot see him. We know that he is working here and there, and we turn quickly to find him, but our eyes get no glimpse of him. We cannot lay our hand upon him. We cannot see his face. Yet we know that while he is not visible to our sight he sees us always and knows our way — where we are, what we are doing, what our circumstances and experiences are.

"He knoweth." One evening Jesus sent his disciples out upon the sea in the boat, to go to the other side, but he did not go with them. In the night a great storm arose, and the disciples were alone. They were in sore distress. We can imagine them looking to the right and to the left, forward and back, but they could not find their Master. Meanwhile, however, though unseen by them, he was looking down upon them in tender love from the mountain-top. He knew the way that they took in the darkness on the sea.

In our experience it may often be that we cannot find God; that we cannot see him; that he shall elude our search, not answer to our cry, and not come when we call for him. Yet it is a precious comfort that in all such cases he knows the way that we take, where we are, and what we are suffering. We are never out of his sight. Always "he knows," and that is enough.

The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends. — JOB xlii. 10.

A GREAT many people who try to be comforters only lay thorns under aching heads. No art needs a more delicate touch than the comforter's. The hands of most of us are too rough to be laid on throbbing hearts. No wonder Job felt that his friends were miserable comforters, or that he was not at first in a mood to pray for them. But until he could pray for them, blessing could not come to him.

The lesson is for us. Others may have injured or grieved us in some way, and we may not be ready to forgive them. But while we feel so, we are shutting divine blessing away from ourselves. Job's praying at length for his friends showed that his heart was now softened toward them, that he had forgiven them. Then blessing came to him. When we can pray for one who has wronged us, misjudged us, or said unkind things of us or to us, hurting us in some way, we are in a condition to receive blessing from God.

Job was also ready now to come out of his own sorrow to try to help others. We do not find comfort by staying in the darkness of our own grief, by thinking only of it; we must forget ourselves, and begin to serve others and seek their good, before we can find the light of God's comfort. Selfishness in sorrow is — selfishness, and selfishness in any form misses God's blessing.

February 29.

This I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers. — ACTS xxiv. 14.

IT is easy enough when we are in meetings of Christians to be known as one of them. But Christ wants us to confess him just as distinctly when we are among his enemies. If any one sneers at us as Christians, we should not blush and hang our head, and stammer out an apology, or, far worse, a denial. We should be ready, without bravado, modestly and humbly, yet boldly, to admit that we are Christians, and to do it in such a way as to show that we rejoice in our relation to Christ, and in confessing it.

Miss Havergal tells of going into a boarding-school as a pupil just after she had united with the church. She was startled to find that in a school family of a hundred she was the only Christian. Her first feeling was that she could not avow her love for Christ with all that company of worldly girls around her. But her second thought was that she could not but avow it, since she was the only one Christ had there to represent him. This thought was most strengthening, and from that hour she quietly took her place as a friend of Christ. It ought to help us, whenever we stand amid enemies of Christ, to remember that he has put us there to represent him, and that if we are ashamed or afraid, we shall be sadly failing and disappointing him.

March 1.

Quit you like men, be strong. — 1 CORINTHIANS xvi. 13.

GENTLENESS and good temper are not all. One may have these qualities and yet be lacking in the completeness of well-rounded character. There must be strength as well as beauty. Love is the fulfilling of the law; all the commandments being summed up in one, "Thou shalt love." But love is a large word. It is like one of those composite pictures into which many pictures are blended. All the elements of duty to God and to our fellows are wrapped up in the divine conception of loving. It will not do, therefore, for us to take merely the things that belong to the gentle side, and think of these as the whole of Christian character. Christ was infinitely gentle. The warmth of his heart made a tropical summer all about him. But back of the gentleness was also infinite strength. We must be like him, not only in gentle warmth, but also in truth and all righteousness. We must be to others, not only tenderness, but also strength to lean upon, and stability in which they may find refuge.

They whose hearts are whole and strong,
 Loving holiness,
Living clean from soil of wrong,
 Wearing truth's white dress, —
They unto no far-off height
 Wearily need climb,
Heaven to them is close in sight
 From these shores of time.

LUCY LARCOM.

March 2.

Ye . . . are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light. — EPHESIANS v. 8.

THE tendency to morbidness which shows itself in some people is most unhealthy. In some it is habitual; a disposition to gloom has been permitted to have its way so long that now the feelings run, even unimpelled, in melancholy grooves. In others it is temporary, caused by loss or trial, the life requiring some time to react after its shock of grief, and rebound to its wonted cheerfulness. The latter experience is not so unwholesome, because it is transient; but the former, wherever it exists, should be treated as a mental disease, and subjected to the wisest processes of cure. It is destructive of the life's beauty. It mars one's usefulness. It grieves God, for it is practical unbelief.

Why should one persist in refusing the blessing of God's bounteous sunshine, and walk only in gloomy paths? Why should one close windows and doors and live in darkness when God's glory of light flows everywhere? The morbid person should heroically set himself the task of getting rid of his miserable gloom. It may take time; for when darkness has become ingrained in the soul it can yield but slowly to the influence of light. Yet the task should be achieved. To stay in the shades of melancholy is most unchristian.

"What can it help us to bewail
Each painful moment as it flies?

March 3.

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ. — 2 THESSALONIANS iii. 5.

WE need the patience of Christ to keep us from over-helping others. No peril is greater than this too eager love, when brought close to those who are in need. We would help too much or too soon. We would lift away burdens that God would have the person carry longer for his own good. We would make the way easy that would better be left hard. We would hasten the learning of the lesson that could far better be learnt slowly. We would force the bursting of the flower before the time God has appointed, thus spoiling his perfect work.

We want to hurry the spiritual development of lives, not content to wait till the development comes naturally. There are hundreds of lives hurt by the impatience of good people to do them good. One writes, and we would do well to mark the lesson:—

> "Nerve his arm and cheer his heart;
> Then stand aside, and say, 'God speed!'"

If we would be truly helpful to others, we must never try too hard to help. It is hard for us, in our eagerness to help, just to do our little, and then stand aside and let God work. We feel we ought to be doing something; but in truth our doing is only hurtful intermeddling, and we would far better keep our hands off.

March 4.

He answered her not a word. — ST. MATTHEW XV. 23.

WHO has not come to Christ with a burden, crying out for help or for relief, only to find him silent? To many of our earnest supplications he seems to answer not a word. We are told to ask and we shall receive, to seek and we shall find, to knock and it shall be opened unto us. Yet there come times when we ask imploringly, and do not seem to receive; when, though we seek with intense eagerness, we do not seem to find what we seek; when we knock at the door of prayer till our hands are bruised and bleeding, and there is no opening of the door.

Sometimes the heavens seem to be brass above us; and we ask, "Is there anywhere an ear to hear our pleadings? Is there anywhere a heart to feel sympathy with us in our overwhelming need?" Sometimes God seems to be far off, so far that our cries cannot reach him. Nothing is so awful as this silence of God — the feeling that communication is cut off. Few prayers in the Bible are more pathetic than that in the psalm: "Be not silent to me, lest I become like them that go down into the pit." Anything from God, any punishment, is better than his silence.

Oh, it would be a dreary world, if the atheist's creed were true, — that there is no God, no ear to hear prayer; that no voice of answering help, or love, or comfort, ever comes out of the heavens.

March 5.

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. — ST. MATTHEW xii. 20.

IT is a high honor that is conferred upon us when God sends to us human hearts to be comforted or human souls to be helped. Yet every thoughtful person must tremble as he accepts the responsibility of such delicate and holy work. It is a serious moment when there is brought to a surgeon a case on the skilful treatment of which a life depends, or when a physician stands by a bedside to administer remedies at the crisis of a fever. But it is a far more serious moment when a human life is put into one's hands to be cured of its faults or comforted in its sorrow, or to have its heart's wounds healed. We need divine skill and wisdom, and great delicacy, for such sacred work. Only Christ can teach us how to deal with human lives in their need and sorrow. He has a most gentle touch. He binds up with infinite skill the wounds that sin or grief has made. He never breaks a bruised reed. He will give us skill in dealing with hurt lives.

Ask God to give thee skill
In comfort's art,
That thou mayst consecrated be
And set apart
Unto a life of sympathy.
For heavy is the weight of ill
In every heart;
And comforters are needed much
Of Christlike touch.

A. E. HAMILTON.

March 6.

I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift. — ROMANS i. 11.

WE ought always to desire to be a blessing to those we love. God sends many of his best spiritual gifts through human hearts and hands. There could be no fitter morning prayer, as we go out for the day, than that we may be permitted to carry some help, comfort, instruction, inspiration, courage, or cheer to every life that our life toueches. There are always those who need such help. No aim in life is nobler than to be a help to others in all gentle, quiet ways.

We should make sure, too, that it is the best we have that we impart to others. There are times when the best thing we can do for a man is to make him laugh. But there are other gifts which we should seek to impart. Sometimes it is cheer to a disheartened spirit. Sometimes it is comfort for sorrow. Sometimes it is the inspiration of a fresh thought which we have found. We should make sure at least that to every one we meet we are ready to impart some gift which will do him good.

"As we meet and touch each day
The many travellers on our way,
Let every such brief contact be
A glorious, helpful ministry;
The contact of the soil and seed,
Each giving to the other's need,
Each helping on the other's best,
And blessing, each, as well as blest."

March 7.

A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. — ST. JOHN X. 5.

IT is true of sheep in the East, that while they quickly respond to their names when their own shepherd calls them, because they know his voice, yet if a stranger comes to the door of the fold and calls them by the same names, they will be alarmed and will turn and run. It ought to be so with Christ's sheep. They should be quick to hear and know their own Shepherd's voice whenever he calls. They should never be afraid when they recognize his call, though it be in the darkness of sorrow or of trial. But they should also be quick to detect any voice that is not their own Shepherd's.

Such voices do fall continually upon the ears of Christ's friends. There are temptations which would lure them away from the truth into paths of wandering, which lead to sin and end in death. There are false guides who profess to be true, and to be very much wiser than the old-fashioned, true guides whom Christ has set to be under shepherds; and they want the young to turn away with them from the old ways. Everywhere the "voice of strangers" is heard. The sheep flee from the voice of strangers, knowing it is not their shepherd's; every voice which is not known to be Christ's should alarm the Christian, causing him to run quickly to his own Shepherd for shelter and protection.

March 8.

So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him. —GENESIS xii. 4.

THAT was faith. Obedience proved it. Abram did not know where he was going; he had simply the call of God and a promise. But he asked no questions. He did not insist on knowing how his journey would come out, how profitable it would be, just what he would get in exchange for the land he was leaving and the sacrifice he was making. Quietly, without question or hesitation, he rose, cut the ties that bound him to his old home, and was off.

That is the kind of faith all of us should have whenever God gives us a call and a promise. Some people want to see where they are going before they will begin to follow Christ; but that is not walking by faith at all.

"I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

We should not trouble ourselves to know where we are to be led, if only we know that God is leading us. His guidance is safe; and we should be willing to trust him, do precisely what he says, and go just where he leads, without asking any questions. Abraham's life is a picture of a true "walk with God."

I think I could go forward with brave and joyful heart,
Though every step should pierce me with unknown fiery smart,
If only I might see thee, if I might gaze above
On all the cloudless glory of the sunshine of thy love.

FRANCES R. HAVERGAL.

March 9.

Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. — ST. MATTHEW XX. 22.

IT was an ignorant prayer which the brothers had offered. They did not know what they were asking for. We know that one dark day two malefactors had the places on the Lord's right and left hand. We all ask many a time for things which we would not dare seek if we knew what they would cost.

There is a heathen story which tells us that once a man asked for this gift — not to die; and it was granted him by the Fates. He was to live on forever. But he had forgotten to ask that his youth and health and strength also might last forever, and so he lived on till age and its infirmities and weaknesses were weighing him down, and his life grew to be a weariness and a burden to him. Existence — for it could hardly be called life — was one long torment to him; and then he wished to die — wished to die and could not. He had asked for a thing which he was totally unfit to enjoy, but he had to take the consequences of it when it was once given.

In our prayers we seek things which we might shrink from seeking, if we knew that they must come to us through pain, tears, and loss. The better way to pray, however, is to let God choose for us, and to give what he sees best for us, and in the way that he knows to be the best.

"Lead me by thy own hand;
Choose out the path for me."

His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God. — 1 KINGS xi. 4.

THE Arabs have a tradition that for a long time a little worm was gnawing in the staff on which Solomon leaned, until at last the staff broke and the great king fell. It was at the king's heart that the worm was really gnawing.

A perfect heart does not mean a sinless heart, but a heart wholly devoted in its aim and motive to God. Solomon had a corner in his heart for the Lord, and then other corners for the gods of all the other nations. The Saviour's words come in here: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

We need to be on our guard against this Solomonian religion. There is plenty of it. It is very broad church. It abhors the preaching of the stern truths of God's word about sin and holiness. It sends well-nigh everybody to heaven, and regards hell as a mediæval fable. It calls strict Christians puritanic or strait-laced. It calls great sins escapades, and finds no use for such psalms as the fifty-first. It is not hard to see in the story of David and Solomon, however, which of the two kinds of religion pleases God the better, and which leads to the nobler end. If what his religion did for Solomon is a fair sample of the outcome of that sort, it does not appear to be quite satisfactory.

"Renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence:
And take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

March 11.

The rest of the acts of Solomon . . . are they not written? — 1 KINGS xi. 41.

THEY are all written. They are not all written in the Bible, but they all went down in the chronicles of the kings. Nor was that all. When manifolding paper is used, the impression of the writing goes through and is traced on underlying sheets. Our life makes its records in the chronicles of the times; but the writing also goes through, and every line and word goes down on pages invisible to our eyes — the pages of God's book. We read in the Bible that the books will be opened for final judgment; and Solomon himself tells us that "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Solomon is gone, and his record cannot now be changed; but we are concerned with our own lives. The young have the chief portion of their life yet before them. It is important that they remember that all their acts are written; that things which are hidden from the eyes of the world are yet written down on the book within the veil; and that some day all secret things shall be manifested, brought fully to the light, before all the universe. It is important, therefore, that they do, along the common days, only the things which they will be glad to see revealed when all secret things shall be uncovered. "When the day of judgment comes, we shall be asked . . . how holy were our lives, and not how fine our words."

March 12.

The sweet psalmist of Israel. — 2 SAMUEL xxiii. 1.

THINK of the influence of David's psalms. Take one for example — the twenty-third. Who can count up the blessings it has left in its wanderings through the world? How many children have learned to say it almost with their first efforts at speech! How many sick people have listened to its sweet, musical accents, as it has been read in softened tones in the hushed chamber! How many dying ones have murmured the beautiful sentences as the gloom gathered about them, especially lingering on the words: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This precious psalm has been like a beautiful angel, flying up and down through the world, bearing its joy and gladness to hearts of young and old, of rich and poor.

I would rather have written the twenty-third psalm than have been the greatest emperor this world ever saw. Yet this is only one of many. The psalms contain the records of men's heart-life, and heart-life is the same in all ages; hence people will always find here words which will interpret their own feelings. There never can be another such Book of Common Prayer as the Psalms.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
He guideth me in the paths of righteousness."

March 13.

For she said within herself, If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole. — ST. MATTHEW ix. 21.

ALL about us evermore the garment of Christ floats. It is by us when we open the Bible and read his words. It is by us when we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with us. It is by our beds of pain when we are sick. It is by us when it grows dark around us with the gloom of sorrow. It is by us in our busiest days, amid the tasks and toils and cares of our life. We never get anywhere but that mystic garment trails close to us, so that we can reach out and touch it with our hand, and have the thrill of our heart's cry flash to the very soul of Christ. If there be in us only a sense of need, and a turning, with even feeblest faith, to Christ, our touch is instantly felt in heaven, and a voice of love calls, "Who touched me?"

Immortal love, forever full,
 Forever flowing free,
Forever shared, forever whole,
 A never-ebbing sea.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps
 To bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
 For him no depths can drown.

The healing of his seamless dress
 Is by our beds of pain;
We touch him in life's throng and press,
 And we are whole again.

JOHN G. WHITTIER.

March 14.

He that judgeth me is the Lord. — 1 CORINTHIANS iv. 4.

THERE is a story of a young composer whose music was being performed. The audience was enthusiastic, applauding wildly as the composition was played. But the young man seemed utterly indifferent to all this applause. He kept his eye fixed intently on one man in the audience, watching every expression that played upon his features. It was his teacher. He cared more for the slightest mark of favor on his face than for all the applause of the great company. So in all our life we should watch the face of Christ, caring only that he should be pleased. It matters far more what he thinks of our performance than what all the world besides thinks. If we live to win his approval, we shall not be afraid to have all our deeds laid bare at the last before the judgment throne.

Thou who seest my soul within,
Thou who knowest my unknown sin,
Through thy holy eyes let me
Learn what sin is unto thee.

If there be in me a thought
That thy dear name honoreth not,
Pierce it with thy pitying gaze
Till its silence turns to praise.

Make me, Pure One, as thou art,
Pure in mind and soul and heart;
Never satisfied with less
Than thy perfect holiness.

LUCY LARCOM.

March 15.

Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. — EPHESIANS iv. 26.

THE only way to make our life continuously beautiful, and to keep it ever sweet with love, is to insist on judging ourselves day by day. Old accounts are hard to settle. Each setting of the sun should be a signal to us to apply the law of Christ to all our life for the day. The hour of evening prayer should always be a time for getting right all that may have gone wrong in us during the day. Then every feeling of bitterness against another should be cast out of our heart. Life is too critical for us to venture into any night's darkness, cherishing anger or envy. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" is a wise counsel.

The wrath left in the heart to-night will be harder to overcome to-morrow than it is to-day; for bitter feelings grow more bitter as they are cherished and nursed, and who knows what the end may be? They may grow into crimes unless quickly put out of the heart. Evening prayer should bring love's flood into all the life.

"Life is too short for hate, —
We mingle here but one brief day;
Too brief for what we meant to say,
When it is all too late.

Life is too short for hate;
The tree is green that soon shall wave
Its leafy plumes above the grave
In that relentless state."

March 16.

I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do. — ST. JOHN xvii. 4.

JESUS is the only man who has ever lived so as to be able to say this. The best lives are but fragments, leaving many things unfinished. Yet we ought to take a lesson from Christ's finishing of his work. He did it, simply by doing each day the will of his Father for the day.

He was a young man when he died — only three and thirty. We think of those who die young as dying before their work is completed. We learn, however, that even a young man, dying, may leave a finished work. The truth is, every one's life is a plan of God. Years enough are given in which to do the work allotted. Even a baby that lives only a day, merely looking into the mother's eyes and then going away, does the work that was given it to do. The young man who dies at three and thirty, with his hands full of tasks, if only he has lived faithfully, has finished the work which God gave him to do. Not years, but faithfulness, counts with God.

"I lay me down to sleep,
With little thought or care
Whether my waking find
Me here or there.

My half-day's work is done,
And this is all my part,
To give a patient God
My patient heart."

March 17.

Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father in law. — EXODUS iii. 1.

FOR forty years Moses had been looking after sheep in the wilderness. It appears to us as if all those years were lost. We can see how profitably the first forty were spent. Those earlier years under his mother's influence — he carried their lessons and impress to the end. Then those years in the schools of Egypt and in the palace — he learned much there that was essential to his mission. But what did that long period in the desert do toward fitting him to be a leader, a lawgiver, the builder of a nation? Far more, no doubt, than we can tell. All that while his character was knitting itself into strength. He was learning self-discipline. In the desert he was taught many a lesson which made him more fit for his work — lessons he could never have learned in the busy life of Pharaoh's palace.

Nowadays, boys can scarcely wait till they are out of their teens to begin their life-work. Some of them think it a waste of time to take a regular college course before they enter a profession. They think they must get at once into the ministry, or into the medical or legal profession. They cannot afford the time to study through all the long course. No wonder such boys fail as men. When God trains a man for any great work he always takes plenty of time. No boy acts wisely who is in such a hurry to get to work that he cannot wait to prepare well.

March 18.

The Lord said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. — EXODUS iv. 27.

GOD always knows where to find the man he wants. Indeed, he trains men while they know it not for the work he means them to do by and by. For eighty years Moses had been in special preparation for his great mission as leader. Aaron also had been in training for the particular part of the work he was to do. He did not know what he was being prepared for, but God knew. Probably Aaron had naturally a fine voice. Then we may suppose that while in Egypt he was led to give much attention to elocution and oratory. He did not know what special use was to be made of his power, but God knew. Then when the time came for him to enter upon his work, he was ready.

The young man does not know what work God may have waiting for him to do. But he possesses certain gifts. These he should train to the very highest degree of efficiency. Then when God wants him he will be ready. It was the daily prayer of a young Christian girl, that God would prepare her for whatever he was preparing for her. Many lives are failures because when God wants them they are not ready. Many a young man enters a profession without qualification, having squandered his opportunities. Is it any wonder he makes a failure? We should train ourselves to proficiency in something, and God will want us by and by, and we shall be ready.

March 19.

And Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses. — EXODUS iv. 30.

ONE of the excuses Moses offered when God bade him go to be the deliverer of his people was that he was not a good speaker. God met his difficulty by telling him that he would provide a speaker. Aaron should be his mouthpiece. So all along the history, Moses is a silent man, and Aaron's is the voice we hear. Each did his own part.

It is just in this way that God's work is always to be done. No one person has universal gifts. One man is a poor talker, but has brains and heart, and can make plans, and impart energy and inspiration. Another is an eloquent speaker, but lacks in the very points in which the first excels. Put the two together, and they can achieve great results. In a church, some can sing well; some cannot sing, but can teach; some can do neither, but can carry comfort to the sick; some can manage business affairs; some can make money and give it. There is a diversity of gifts, no two having the same; but if all work together, each doing his own part, the church is not only a power, but there is no necessary work which is not done. Never worry because you have not the gift some other one has; you have some gift, and that is the one God wants you to use.

"Yet do thy work: it shall succeed
In thine or another's day,
And if denied the victor's meed,
Thou shalt not lack the toiler's pay."

March 20.

Moses made an end of speaking. — DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 45.

SO we all shall do some day. Moses knew it was the end for him; we may not know when our end is at hand. Any word of ours, spoken amid glee and merriment, may be our last. If we always thought of this, would it not make us more careful? Would we ever say an unkind word to a friend, if we felt that we may never have an opportunity to unsay it or atone for it? Would we ever utter an angry, untrue, or unclean word, if we only remembered that it may be the last utterance our lips shall give forth? We want to have beautiful endings to our life, to leave sweet memories behind us in the hearts of those who love us. We want our names to be fragrant in the homes on whose thresholds our footfalls are wont to be heard. We want the memory of our last words in our friends' ears to live as a tender joy with them as the days pass away. We can be sure of all this only by making every word we speak beautiful enough to be a last word. For with any sentence we may come to the end of our speaking.

We should waste no moments in weak regret
 If the day were but one;
If what we remember and what we forget
 Went out with the sun;
We should be from our clamorous selves set free
 To work or to pray,
And to be what the Father would have us be,
 If we had but a day.

MARY LOWE DICKINSON.

The Lord spake unto Moses . . . Get thee up into this mountain . . . and die. — DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 48, 49, 50.

TO each of us the summons will sometime come: "Get thee away from thy farm, thy store, thy desk, thy books, thy pleasure, into the silence of thine own chamber, and die." We may not hear the voice nor be conscious, when we lay down our work at nightfall, that we are going away to die; but this will not alter the fact. We will come to our last hour, when the voice none can resist will call us from earth.

Moses was to die alone. None of the people accompanied him. Every one of us really has to die alone. Our friends may gather around us; they may hold our hand; they may sing or pray with us; they may drop their tears on our cold cheek, and print hot kisses of farewell on our lips; yet we must die alone. No one can accompany us beyond the foot of the mountain. This is a point at which the tenderest affection can give no help. It is like one going out on the sea in a ship. Friends come to the shore and wave their farewells as we go out, but not one of them goes with us. We must die alone;

"Not sweeping up together,
In whirlwind or in cloud;
In the hush of the summer weather,
Or when storms are thundering loud;
But one by one we go,
In the sweetness none may know."

March 22.

Now it came to pass, after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people. — JOSHUA i. 1, 2.

SORROW came to you yesterday and emptied your home. Your first impulse now is to give up and sit down in despair amid the wrecks of your hopes. But you dare not do it. You are in the line of battle, and the crisis is at hand. To falter a moment would be to imperil some holy interest. Other lives would be harmed by your pausing. Holy interests would suffer, should your hands be folded. You must not linger even to indulge your grief. Sorrows are but incidents in life, and must not interrupt us. We must leave them behind, while we press on to the things that are before.

Then God has so ordered, too, that in pressing on in duty we shall find the truest, richest comfort for ourselves. Sitting down to brood over our sorrows, the darkness deepens about us and creeps into our heart, and our strength changes to weakness. But if we turn away from the gloom, and take up the tasks and duties to which God calls us, the light will come again and we shall grow stronger.

"When all our hopes are gone,
'Tis well our hands must still keep toiling on
For others' sake;
For strength to bear is found in duty done;
And he is blest indeed who learns to make
The joy of others cure his own heart-ache."

March 23.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. — ST. JOHN xvii. 15.

CHRIST does not wish that we shall be kept from suffering, but that in our suffering we shall not sin. He does not wish that we may never have sickness, but that in our sickness we may not fail of patience, sweetness, and trust. He does not wish that we may have no trials or struggles, but that in our trials and struggles we may not be overcome and our lives hurt or marred.

There is only one evil in the world, but it lurks everywhere. It comes even in our purest joys; we may forget God in them. The happiest home may become a place of peril to us, leading us to self-indulgence, love of ease, forgetfulness of the world's need and sorrow, neglect of duties, even to forgetfulness of God.

There is no sin in our being hated by the world, in our being wronged or injured by others; but if we endure the hatred and the wrong resentfully, if we grow angry and seek to avenge ourselves, we have sinned. There is no sin in our being assailed by temptations, — we cannot live a day without being tempted, — but the moment we yield to the temptation, we have sinned. There is no sin in our suffering adversity, disappointment, loss, want; but the moment that in any such experience we repine, doubt God, or rebel against his will, we have been hurt.

It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. — 1 JOHN iii. 2.

THINK of the possibilities of man in the light of the revealings of Christianity. You know what the Christ says of the future of every one who believes in him, but have you ever thought deeply about it?

Have you ever thought seriously about the word eternity, as a definition of the duration of your own life? Jesus tells us we shall have eternal life, and that means not endless existence only, but endless growth, development, progress. The New Testament tells us that we know now only in part, only little fragments of any knowledge, but that some day we shall know perfectly. It tells us also that there will be the most wondrous moral development in these lives of ours.

There is a glory in the Christian's soul not yet revealed. The Bible lifts the veil, and shows us a glimpse of Christ. "We shall be like him." I cannot explain that. It is too high for any human thought to comprehend it. But surely it tells of marvellous possibilities in men. That is the future of every one who will link his life to the life of Christ.

"Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve,
And press with vigor on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal,
And an immortal crown."

March 25.

Ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. — 2 CORINTHIANS iv. 5.

IT is said of a great artist, that when painting his immortal pictures on the ceiling of one of the chapels in St. Peter's, he carried a little lamp fastened to his cap on his forehead, so that no shadow of himself should fall on his work. It would be well if we should learn always so to carry the light by which we work, that self shall never in any way come between our lamp and our work. We should so relate our own personality to our serving that it shall never cast a shadow on the things we are doing for Christ.

It is not easy so to move through life that no mood or feeling of our own shall ever affect our spirit or temper as we go on with our duty. Ofttimes the temptation is strong. Things do not go altogether to our mind. Other people do not accord to us the honor or respect we think we deserve. The tendency is to feel hurt, and then to allow our hurt consciousness to affect our interest in the work or our relations with our fellow-workers. But this is not the Christian way — not the way Jesus would act. No apparent or real slighting of us by any other should make us less faithful. Touchiness is not among the fruits of the Spirit.

> And wouldst thou hasten in another soul
> God's kingdom on the earth, of love and peace?
> Learn first thyself, thy spirit, to control;
> From all that's false and evil in thee cease.
>
> JONES VERY.

March 26.

I forgave thee all that debt . . . Shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant? — ST. MATTHEW xviii. 32, 33.

THOUGH the servant had been forgiven all his vast debt, he had not been willing to forgive a fellow servant a mere trifle of debt.

No Christian precept is urged more repeatedly and more earnestly than this. In the form of prayer which our Lord taught his disciples he linked together divine and human forgiveness: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Then he added a clear and unmistakable word, emphasizing the lesson: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

St. Paul enjoins, "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." This is but one of many repetitions of the solemn lesson. If we are not ready to forgive those who do us little injuries, it is proof that we are not forgiven of God. That is, before we can receive divine forgiveness we must have the spirit of forgiveness in our own heart. If there be not in the heart the spirit of forgiveness, evidently it has not yet experienced the mercy of God.

It was said of one: "His heart was as great as the world, but there was no room in it to hold the memory of a wrong."

March 27.

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life. — ST. JOHN viii. 12.

WE are always coming to points we have never passed before. Every new temptation is such a point. We cannot get through it unless we have a guide. Some of you know how dark and strange it seemed to you the first time you had to enter the valley of sorrow. A godly man says: "I shall never forget, while memory lasts, the strangeness of the experience through which I passed when first the reaper whose name is Death came into my home, and with his sickle keen cut down at one thrust two of my children. The stroke blinded me for the moment; but when at length I opened my eyes, I saw the ark in the river, and that instantly steadied me. I knew then where I was."

Every new duty brings us also to a way we know not. Every fresh responsibility calls us to walk in an unfamiliar road. All life is strange, and we cannot find the way ourselves.

Then there is that last walk on earth — into the valley of shadows. We never can get any experience in dying; for no feet ever walk twice on that way, nor has any friend ever come back to tell us what it is like. When we come to die, we shall find ourselves in an experience we have never known before. If we have not Christ in the strange, unfamiliar path, we shall not find the way.

March 28.

Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? . . . Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. — ST. JOHN ix. 2, 3.

ARE troubles sent to punish us for our sins? The people in Christ's day thought so. But Jesus gave a different explanation. He said the man was blind that the works of God should be made manifest in him. His blindness led him into contact with Jesus and thus brought him a double blessing, — the opening of his natural eyes, and the opening of his soul's eyes. Probably he would never have met Jesus but for his misfortune of blindness. If he had not been blind, this miracle of his healing would never have been wrought.

A great many revealings and blessings come through troubles. Jesus said the sickness of Lazarus was for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. No doubt every sickness is a chance for a blessing of some kind, both to the person who is sick and to his friends. Every loss we have is meant to be the revealing to us of a gain which would more than make compensation. Every disappointment in our life is intended to give us a better thing than that which we have failed to get. Wordsworth writes:—

> When a damp
> Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
> The thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
> Soul-animating strains — alas, too few!

Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ. — 1 CORINTHIANS xi. 1.

YOU may think you have no influence over any other lives, but you have. There are those who will do what you do, and be what you are. If you are reverent, they will be reverent; if you are false, they are false. Your influence touches many other lives, and leaves either blessing or curse.

A gentleman told the story of his conversion to Christ: "If I had been going to ruin alone," he said, "I should have gone on. But one night I came in from the wine-table, and looked at my sleeping babes as they lay in their holy innocence amid the snowy pillows. I held the lamp so that its beams fell full upon their sweet faces. As I stood there in the awful silence, unbroken, save by the ticking of the clock on the mantel, and the soft breathing of my little ones, there arose a terrifying vision before my eyes. I saw myself sweeping down toward perdition, and these, my precious children, clinging to my garments. I could not stand that. I could go to ruin myself, but to drag my angel babes there with me — oh, I could not do that! So right there beside the crib, I fell on my knees before God, and asked him to save me for my children's sake." Few motives in life could be stronger than the consciousness that the career and destiny of other lives will depend on what we do with our own life. We should be able always to say, "Imitate me and you will live nobly."

March 30.

Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. — ST. MATTHEW x. 42.

WE never can know what the full outcome of our simplest kindnesses will be. We speak a cheerful word to one who is discouraged. We pass on, scarcely giving another thought to the matter. Yet perhaps our word has saved a life from despair, helped a fainting robin back unto its nest again, or changed a destiny from darkness to light.

Nor can we know how far the influence of our word shall extend. A pebble dropped into the sea starts wavelets which go around and around the world. A word spoken into the air goes pulsating in the atmosphere forever. So it is with the things we do for Christ. We cannot follow them, to trace their story; but their blessing shall never cease from the world's life. There will be many surprises in heaven when we learn the effects of our words and deeds of love.

He who plants a tree
He plants love;
Tents of coolness spreading out above
Wayfarers he may not live to see.
Gifts that grow are best;
Hands that bless are blest.
Plant; life does the rest.
Heaven and earth help him who plants a tree,
And his work its own reward shall be.

LUCY LARCOM.

March 31.

Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. — ST. JOHN xiii. 1.

YOU may write your own name into this verse, and it will be as true as it was of the company at the table that night. Having loved you, he loves you unto the end.

It was the night before Jesus died. He was with his disciples at the passover. Holy memories filled his mind. But amid these, his love for his own lost none of its warmth. His "hour" of sorrow and shame was come. But with all this before him, he did not forget "his own." He gathered them about him, and spent the last evening with them. He had no thought of himself; he thought only of "his own." His personal grief and bitterness were kept in his own heart while he gave them joy. His love over-mastered his sorrow.

Then there was something else. The words read: "His hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father." So there was glory for him beyond his cross. There were a few hours of darkness, woe, and anguish, and then he should leave this world and be at home again. His heart must have been full of rapture and expectancy as he looked forward, knowing that before to-morrow's sun should set, he would be with his Father. Yet even this blessed consciousness did not make him forget his friends. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."

April 1.

She hath anointed my body aforehand for the burying. — ST. MARK xiv. 8.

MANY people would have kept the jar till Jesus was dead, and would then have broken it to anoint his cold body. At least, that is the way too many of us do in these days. We wait till our friend dies, and then send our flowers and speak our words of appreciation. Should we not learn a lesson from Mary? The kind words we mean to speak when our friends are dead, let us speak while they can hear them. The flowers we mean to send for their coffin, let us send to brighten the rough paths for their feet. The epitaphs we mean to put upon white marble, let us carve in deeds of gentle love while our friends are with us. Words of cheer to-day are what people crave.

"Withhold all eulogies when I am dead,
All noisy sorrow;
Give me the tender word to-day
Instead of tears to-morrow.

Speak not my name, when I am passed from earth,
In tones of sadness;
At thought of me repress no note of mirth,
No burst of gladness.

Regard me not as altered when removed
To the hereafter;
Think of me still as loving and as loved
With joy and laughter.

Delay not thou when I have wounded sore,
Till thou outlive me,
To grant the pardon that I here implore;
But now forgive me."

April 2.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. — ISAIAH liii. 4.

WHATEVER the cause of grief may be, there is rich comfort in the remembrance of the sorrows of Christ. It assures us that Christ understands our pain. In the garden he went a stone's cast farther than any of his disciples went. The picture is a parable to us. It is always so. Wherever you bow in the deep shadows of grief, you have but to lift up your eyes, and you will see Jesus in still deeper shadows, a stone's cast beyond you. His sorrow was sorer than yours.

There is comfort also in the remembrance that blessing comes out of suffering patiently endured. All the world's peace and hope, and all heaven's joy and glory, are fruits of a great sorrow — the sorrow of Christ. Blessing will come always out of sorrow, if we but accept it submissively and reverently.

While we think of the sufferings of Christ, we must remember also that he came from them all unharmed, his life shining in divine radiance, lifted to glory, too, as a fruit of his suffering. This reminds sorrowing believers that they too shall pass *through* their time of tribulation, that no scars and no manner of hurt shall be upon their souls because of their sufferings, but that they shall shine in fairer beauty and diviner glory, and shall be lifted up to higher honor, because of what they have suffered with Christ.

April 3.

Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures. —1 CORINTHIANS XV. 3.

THERE have been great days in the history of the human race, — days of triumph whose victories have enriched the world; days of honor whose brightness has made the world lighter; days of great deeds which have lifted man to loftier, diviner heights; days of heroic, self-forgetful love which has made the air sweeter with its odorous perfumes. But the day of all days in fruit of blessing and good in the world's story, was that Good Friday when the Son of man gave his life on the cross to save men.

> "From thy blessed gloom
> The hope of all the world does rise and sing;
> By thy sweet pain, immortal joy is won;
> And in the happy shadow of thy tomb
> Is hid the root of Easter's blossoming."

There could have been no Easter without a Good Friday; no rising again without the dying on the cross. Christ must taste death for every man before he could offer deathless life to every man. The touch of the cross is on every hope of Christian faith. The light that shines in soft lustre throughout all the world streams from the cross. The sorrow of Calvary is that which is softening all human hearts, and making all life gentler and sweeter. The power that is drawing all men upward is the Christ lifted up.

April 4.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 46.

THERE is a picture which represents the after scenes on that day of the crucifixion. It is all over. The crowds have gone away. The evening sun is shining out again on Calvary. The body of the Saviour has been borne to the sepulchre. The cross has been taken down, and lies on the ground. A company of little children, bright with the glow of childhood's innocence, led to the place by accident or curiosity, are seen bending over the signs of the day's terrible work. One of the children holds in his hand a nail which a little time before had pierced a hand or a foot of the patient Sufferer, and stands spellbound with horror as he gazes at it. His gentle heart is shocked at sin's dreadful work. On all the children's faces the same expression of amazement is depicted.

No one with pure and gentle heart can ever look at the death of Christ on the cross with any but feelings of amazement and horror at sin's awfulness. It was sin that nailed Jesus on the cross. It was sin that wreathed the circlet of thorns for his brow. We say the Jews crucified Christ; yes, but we helped to do it. Our sins drove the nails. Would you see what sin is? Stand by the cross and ponder its terrible work there in the death of the Redeemer. See what it cost the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

April 5.

That he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures. — 1 CORINTHIANS XV. 4.

IF our faith stops at the cross, it misses the blessing of the fullest revealing of Christ. You need a Saviour who not merely two thousand years ago went to death to redeem you, but one who also is alive to walk by your side in loving companionship. You want a Saviour who can hear your prayers, to whose feet you can creep in penitence when you have sinned, to whom you can call for help when the battle is going against you. You want a Saviour who is interested in all the affairs of your common life, and who can assist you in every time of need.

You want a Christ who can be a real friend, loving you, keeping close beside you, "closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." You want a Saviour who will come into your life, and will save you, not by one great act of centuries past, but by a life warm and throbbing with love to-day, and living again in you.

It is for love that our hearts hunger. The bread that will satisfy us is not the bread of memorial merely, the memory of a great devotion of love long, long since, but the bread of love living, present, warm, and throbbing. Nothing less than a living Christ will do for us.

And that is the Christ the gospel brings to us — one who was dead, and is now alive for evermore.

April 6.

Why seek ye the living among the dead? — LUKE xxiv. 5.

A DYING Christ alone will not satisfy your heart. While you praise the love that was crucified for you, you crave love from a Saviour who lives. Memories of a friend who is gone may be very sweet. They fill our life with fragrance. The odors of love departed stay in a home like the perfume of sweet flowers when the flowers have been borne away. But how unsatisfying are the mere memories of your friend when your heart hungers for love's real presence, and touch and tenderness! No more will the mere memories of the Love that died on the cross for you satisfy your cravings for Christ. You must have the living One for your friend.

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God," cried the Hebrew psalmist, and cries every human soul. It is only as we realize the truth of a living Christ that our hearts are satisfied. We crave love — a bosom to lean upon, a hand to touch ours, a heart whose beatings we can feel, a personal friendship that will come into our life with its sympathy, its inspiration, its companionship, its shelter, its life, its comfort. All this the living Christ is to us, if we but learn the blessed truth of his resurrection.

"For warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

April 7.

And very early on the first day of the week, they come to the tomb when the sun was risen. — ST. MARK xvi. 2.

THE women did not find the body of Jesus in the grave. Suppose they had found it there, still held in the power of death; suppose that Jesus had never risen; what would have been the consequences? It would have been as if the sun and moon and stars were all to be blotted from the sky, or as if they had all set one day and never risen again.

St. Paul tells us in his immortal chapter on the resurrection, what our loss would be should it be found that Christ did not rise. "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain. . . . Ye are yet in your sins." Paul had preached of a Saviour who died for men's sins and then rose for their justification; but if Christ yet lay in the power of death, his sacrifice for sin had not availed.

If you were imprisoned in some great fortress, and one who loved you went forth to try to rescue you, and fell and died fighting upon the walls, you would cherish the memory of your friend's valiant effort on your behalf, but you would still remain undelivered. So would it have been with those whom Christ came to save, if he had perished in death and had not risen. He would have been defeated in his great effort, and those for whom he died would have remained without deliverance.

April 8.

But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee. — ST. MARK xvi. 7.

THE joyful news must not be kept, but must be carried to the other sorrowing friends of Jesus, and must be carried quickly. There must not be a moment lost. The happy women must not sit down together in mere personal enjoyment of the blessed news; there were others in the darkness of sorrow, and to these they must hasten with the gladness. We must not forget in our joy of Christian faith that there are others who have none of this joy; our mission is to carry the news, and to rejoice as we go on our way.

"Tell his disciples and Peter." Why was Peter specially named? It was because he was the saddest of all, the one who most needed the comfort. He had sinned, and was weeping in penitence. This showed the tenderness of the heart of Christ toward all penitents. It must have given Peter unspeakable joy to get this message. Jesus then had not cast him off. He would now have an opportunity to weep on his Lord's bosom, confess his sin, and crave and obtain pardon.

"And Peter" has its gracious message for every penitent soul. Have you grieved Christ by sin, by denial, by any unfaithfulness, and are you weeping in sorrow over your sin? Those who have fallen are the very ones that lie most heavily on the heart of Jesus, just because they have fallen. He came to be a physician to the sick.

And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. — ST. LUKE xxiv. 31.

ANNIVERSARY days always bring back the memories of those who have gone. Out of what home has not some loved face vanished? You are thinking of these departed ones. They died in Christ. The gospel of these Easter days lifts the veil, and shows them to you away beyond death, unhurt by death, living still, the same gentle friends they were when you knew them here and clasped them in your arms.

I had a letter the other day from Rome, written by a dear friend who is journeying abroad in search of health. The letter was full of bright words which reminded me of my friend's beautiful life. There was the same old warmth, the same eager interest in things and persons, the same kindly thoughtfulness. Just like my friend, I said, as I read the letter. Being in Rome has made no change in the gentle spirit.

It is just so with our friends in heaven. My father and mother are there. If I were to go home to-day, I know I should see them unchanged. Of course the marks of care are gone, or have become transfigured, and are now marks of beauty. They have not their earthly bodies, but then those worn and weary bodies were not my father and mother. Death ended nothing beautiful in them. I should see them living in new and richer life, engaged, as they used to be on earth, in loving ministries.

Mary . . . seeth the stone taken away from the tomb. — ST. JOHN XX. 1.

THIS stone had worried the women as they hurried toward the grave. They knew it was there, that it was too heavy for them with their frail hands to roll away, and they wondered how they could get it removed. But now, when they came in sight of the tomb, Mary looked up and saw that the stone was rolled aside.

This incident illustrates many experiences in our common life. We worry about difficulties and obstacles that lie in our path and seem to block our progress. But when we move on obediently, and come to the place of the supposed hindrance or obstacle, it is gone, or it was never there save in our imagination. We all know that very many of our anxieties prove in the end to be really groundless.

We ought to learn here once for all the lesson, that when God sends us anywhere he intends to make it possible for us to go. Duty's path always opens for us as we go on — not before we start, but as we obey and move forward. Yet we must not expect there will never be any difficulties to meet or obstacles to surmount. God never has promised that. Too easy a path is often a bane in life, not a blessing. The difficulties and obstacles that remain may be made stepping-stones by which we shall rise to higher things.

April 11.

The eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. — ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 16.

WE should always keep the appointments Jesus makes with us. If we fail we shall surely be the losers. Suppose some of our Lord's disciples had stayed away, for some cause, from this meeting in Galilee. Think what they would have missed! They might have said: "It is a long distance to the place fixed upon;" or, "The mountain is steep, and I do not like to climb it;" or, "I fear it will rain or be stormy;" or, "Perhaps he will not be there; I cannot understand how he can be risen from the dead."

For any of these, or for other similar reasons, some might have been absent that wonderful day. But they would have missed a glorious sight of the risen Jesus, and would not have heard his words of commission and promise. To the end of their life they would have regretted that they had not kept their Lord's appointment that day.

Christ makes many appointments for us. Sometimes we do not think them very important, and are easily hindered from keeping them. But we never can know what we lose by these neglects. Jesus always comes where he asks us to meet him, and gives blessings there to those who have been faithful in gathering to wait for him. We do not know what we may miss any common Sabbath by staying away from the services appointed by Christ.

Having hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust. — ACTS xxiv. 15.

THE hope of resurrection to a believer in Christ ought to be a wonderful inspiration in the earthly life. The grave is not the end; we shall come again from it in new beauty, and shall live on forever. Not only did Christ teach that the dead shall rise again, but he himself went down into the grave and then came again, after three days, alive. Thus he showed the possibility of resurrection; one man died and rose again, and may not all? But his resurrection meant more than that. He was the head of his people, and as such his victory was for them. He met and conquered death for them.

Now death is a vanquished foe. St. Paul puts it very strongly, and says that Christ abolished death. Jesus himself put it no less strongly when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." There is no break, no interruption, in a Christian's life in what we call dying. The spirit lives more really, fully, gloriously, a moment after death, than ever it lived before. Then the body which goes down into the grave, sleeps — that is the Christian word — sleeps in Jesus, until the resurrection, when Christ will come and call it up; not the old earthly, worn-out, sin-corrupted, and mortal flesh and blood, but a new, strong, glorious, incorruptible, immortal, spiritual body, to live with Christ forever.

April 13.

I am the first and the last, and the Living one. — REVELATION i. 18.

THINK of the brokenness, the incompleteness, the littleness, of these lives of ours. We get glimpses of beauty in character which we are not able to attain. We have longings which seem to us too great ever to come true. We dream of things we want to do; but when we try to work them out, our clumsy hands cannot put them into realizations. We have glimmerings of a love that is very rich and tender, without trace of selfishness, without envy or jealousy, without resentment — a love that seeketh not its own, is not provoked, beareth all things. We get the vision from the life of Christ himself. We say, "I will learn that lesson of love; I will be like that." But we fail.

We strive to be sweet-spirited, unselfish, thoughtful, to keep good temper; but we must wet our pillow with tears at the close of our marred days, because we cannot be what we strive to be. We have glimpses of a peace which is very beautiful. We strive after it — strive with intense effort, but do not reach it.

So it is in all our living. Life is ever something too large for us. We attain only fragments of living. Yet all this incompleteness, this unsatisfactoriness, this poor unattainment, finds its realization in the risen Christ. His is the perfect life, and in him we shall find fulness of life.

April 14.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord. — 1 CORINTHIANS XV. 58.

JESUS walks no more among men, doing his deeds of love, but he sends his followers forth to do the works in his name. We ought to abound in all loving ministry just as he did. It is not enough to be good, gentle, sweet, amiable, kindly, patient. It is beautiful to live such a life; and its influence is far-reaching, like the fragrance of Mary's ointment.

But we must also be full of good works. We must be winners of souls. We must live to do good to men, to comfort sorrow, to feed hunger, to relieve distress, to cheer the disheartened, to break chains and liberate sin's captives, to stand up for the truth, to do battle for the right. We are to be like Christ, and we begin to be like Christ only when we begin to be useful.

It ought to be a wondrous inspiration to us, in our work for Christ, to read that our labor for God is not in vain. No word of truth spoken in this world is ever lost. On the rocks we find the impressions left ages since by leaves that fell on the soft clay and seemed to perish. So somewhere every word we speak for God, and every smallest deed we do for the love of Christ, leave their immortal record.

April 15.

That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. — ST. JOHN xxi. 7.

DR. CULROSS compares the character of John, in its mellow ripeness, to an ancient, extinct volcano. Where once the crater yawned, there is now a verdurous, cup-like hollow on the mountain summit. Where once the fierce fires burned, lies a still, clear pool of water, looking up like an eye to the beautiful heavens above, its banks covered with sweet flowers. "It is an apt parable," he says, "of this man. Naturally and originally volcanic, capable of profoundest passion and daring, he is new-made by grace, till in his old age he stands out in calm grandeur of character, and depth and largeness of soul, with all the gentlenesses and graces of Christ adorning him — a man, as I imagine him to myself, with a face so noble that kings might do him homage, and so sweet that little children would run to him for his blessing." This is a true and striking portrait of this disciple of love.

What was it that wrought this transformation in John, that changed the "son of thunder" into the apostle of Christly affectionateness? It was leaning upon the Master's bosom that did it. The lump of common clay lay upon the perfumed rose, and the sweetness of the rose entered into it. John lay on Jesus' bosom, on the bosom of the all-loving, and the love of Jesus passed into John's soul and transformed it. That was the secret of John's sanctification.

Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? . . . Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. — ST. JOHN xxi. 16.

WE are striving to follow Christ, but we are weak. We intend to be loving, but we mar our days with unhappy tempers and selfish strivings. We intend to be strong in faith, but many times our trust fails us. We bow our heads to take the Master's benediction, "Peace be unto you;" but again and again the peace is broken. We intend to show the world a pattern of Christ-likeness, but the temptations about us are so sore that every day we are conscious of having failed to be true. We set out in the morning brave and confident; but alas! how often does the evening find us defeated!

What shall we do? There stands the Master, patient, unwearied in his loving, asking, "Lovest thou me?" Dare we say, "Yes, Lord?" If he were but a man like ourselves, we could not; for our failures would seem to disprove our word, and he could not read the love in our secret heart under all the inconsistency. But he knows all the truth about us. He knows we are sincere and loyal in heart, though so unworthy. He sees the love amid the broken vows and the failures. Therefore, we can look up out of our deep humiliation, and say with inexpressible comfort, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

Lovest thou me? . . . Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. — ST. JOHN xxi. 17.

YOU look into your life to-day and what do you see there? Failures, broken purposes, promises not kept, commandments violated, purity stained, everything sullied. Jesus comes and looks into your face, with that calm, holy, searching gaze of his, and says, "Lovest thou me?" As you are about to answer, you think of all you have done that has been dishonorable and sinful. You are dumb before him. Yet you are conscious that you do love him; that in your heart, beneath all your sins, failures, and faults, there is love for him. What a comfort it is to cast yourself on his knowledge of what is in you! Perhaps men sneer, and say that one who has stumbled as you have done surely cannot love Christ. But Christ knows the love, even amid the sins and failures.

I am glad that perfection is not the test of discipleship. We may be full of faults. We go on stumbling every day. We do nothing beautifully. We misrepresent the Christ whose name we bear. We hurt the friends we want to help. One came to me full of grief because her heart had been so rebellious in time of sorrow. Another came broken down because in a time of great temptation he had dishonored Christ. Christ knows all these sad failures. He looks at the stained scroll we fold up at the close of the day with the blots on it. But while he sees the worst, he sees also the best; and he loves on — loves unto the uttermost.

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. — St. John xi. 23.

THERE is wondrous music in these words as they are spoken in the ears of sorrowing ones beside the coffin and by the new-made grave. It was a dim teaching in Martha's time, but soon afterward that occurred which made it bright and clear as day. Jesus himself lay in the grave, and then rose from death, walking forth in the light and radiancy of immortal youth.

Christ was the firstfruits of resurrection; that is, his resurrection was an earnest or pledge as well as an example of the coming resurrection of all who believe on him.

We have a right to lay flowers on the coffins of our Christian dead. They will come forth in the beauty of new life. We open our New Testament and see Jesus, after he had risen, away beyond death. He has not been harmed by dying. No beam of the beauty of his life is quenched. The threads of the earthly life are not severed. He has not forgotten his friends, but takes up again the old companionships and friendships. So will it be with our beloved ones who sleep in Jesus. They will rise; and they will be the same persons we have known here, only they will be cleansed of their earthliness and their mortality. And they will not have forgotten us. Love never faileth. We shall resume friendship's story on the other side.

April 19.

Jesus saith, Take ye away the stone. — St. John xi. 39.

We find in all our Lord's life an economy of miracle. He never put forth supernatural power unless it was necessary. Could not Jesus have taken away the stone himself? Certainly he could. The power that could call the dead to life could easily have lifted back the piece of rock from the door of the tomb. But there is always something left for human hands to do.

God honors us by making us co-workers with himself, both in providence and grace. He feeds us, but ordinarily we must toil to earn and gather our own food. He saves people's souls; but he uses men to speak the message, and then to help in winning the lost. He makes his work dependent, too, upon our fidelity in doing our part. He still wants us to take away the stones that shut our friends in their prison.

This command also exercised the faith of the friends. If they had refused to do what he bade them do, the miracle could not have been wrought. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Had not the unbelief given away to faith, Lazarus would not have been raised. May it not be that many times, in our own days, and in the experiences of our own lives, great works of divine power which Christ stands ready to perform, are not wrought — because we do not believe?

April 20.

As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. — ST. JOHN XX. 21.

THE Son of God came down and lived in human form on the earth, that men might see God in the flesh. He said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." All the love, the gentleness, the patience, the compassion, the purity, the truth, the righteousness, which people saw in the life of Jesus, was simply a revealing of God. That is what God is like.

Now the Christ sends us out to reveal God to men. We are to show to them in our character, disposition, spirit, and temper, the qualities of God. If any one asks us to tell him what God is like, we ought to be able to say humbly and yet truthfully, "I am trying to be like God. He lives in me, and his qualities shine out in my life. Look at me, and you will see what God is like."

I know how dimly the beauty of God does shine in us even at the best; but we cannot get away from the truth that if we are indeed Christ's, he lives in us. St. Paul said more than once: "Be ye imitators of me, even as I am of Christ." We must be able to say the same.

"The dear Christ dwells not afar,
The king of some remoter star,
But here, amidst the poor and blind,
The bowed and suffering of our kind;
In works we do, in prayers we pray,
Life of our life, he lives to-day."

April 21.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end. — JEREMIAH XXIX. 11.

IT is better we should not know our future. If we did, we should often spoil God's plan for our life. If we could see into to-morrow, and know the troubles it will bring, we might be tempted to seek some way of avoiding them, while really they are God's way to new honor and blessing. God's thoughts for us are always thoughts of love, good, promotion; but sometimes the path to the hilltop lies through dark valleys or up rough paths. Yet to miss the hard bit of road is to fail of gaining the lofty height. It is better, therefore, to walk, not knowing, with God, than it would be to see the way and choose for ourselves. God's way for us is always better than our own.

"Through pastures fair,
By sea-girt paths all wild with rock and foam,
O'er velvet sward, and desert stern and bare,
The flock comes home.

Yet safe at last,
Within the fold they gather, and are still;
Sheltered from driving shower and stormy blast,
They fear no ill.

Through life's dark ways,
Through flowery paths where evil angels roam,
Through restless nights, and long, wasting days,
Christ's flock comes home."

April 22.

I will bring the blind by a path that they knew not; in paths that they know not will I lead them: I will make . . . crooked places straight. — ISAIAH xlii. 16.

GOD leads often to good ends through ways which to us seem dark. He can make crooked things straight for us. Perhaps we shall find at the last that many of the best things of our life are things over which we grieve now as blunders. We do the best we can, and yet we fail, or seem to fail; but in God's eyes the effort tells of love and of desire to please him, and thus wins from him warmer commendation than does many a piece of elaborate work, wrought in most delicate way.

God can use our poorest efforts ofttimes to greater purpose than our finest and most finished endeavors, because they are less spoiled by human pride. Self-consciousness always mars human work. The things we do which satisfy us are not likely to satisfy our Master. Many times the piece of work which we think very fine, which pleases us well, turns out to be of little use. God cannot use it because we have left no place in it for him. Then, ofttimes something which we think of no account God uses to accomplish great results. The less of self there is in our service the more is the service worth. There is room then in it for more of God, and it is the divine in what we do that alone gives it efficiency and value.

April 23.

For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. — ISAIAH lv. 10, 11.

EVERY one knows the effect of the rain, especially when it falls on a field that has been parched and withered. Its drops go down to the roots of the dying grass, the fading flowers, and the drooping trees, and soon new life appears everywhere. The grass is greener. The flowers revive and pour out fragrance. All vegetation is renewed. So it is when God's word comes to a fainting, failing human life.

Sometimes rain comes in storms, with black clouds and fierce lightnings and thunders. People tremble and are afraid as they look on. But the storm passes, pouring out rich blessings of rain, which make all the fields rejoice. God sometimes sends his word to us in dark, portentous forms, — sickness, loss, disappointment, sorrow, trial. At first we are terrified; but in the end, when the storms have cleared away, we find that the dark clouds we so dreaded were but God's messengers to bring to us rich blessings of grace.

God bends from out the deep, and says,
"I gave thee of my seed to sow;
Bringest thou me my hundred-fold?"
Can I look up with face aglow,
And answer, "Father, here is gold"?

J. R. LOWELL.

April 24.

Some seeds fell by the wayside . . . others fell upon the rocky places . . . others fell upon the thorns. — St. Matthew xiii. 4, 5, 7.

FROM the heart trodden by passing feet of pleasure, business, or care, the birds carry off the seeds the moment they are cast from the sower's hand. On the heart with a thin, emotional stratum on its surface, the seed seems for a time to make a deep impression. The hearer weeps under the sermon. He is amazed at the coldness of ordinary Christians. But in a little time it is all over. He has no depth of conviction, and the quick growths of his first faith are soon withered in the heat of life's trials.

In the heart filled with the briers and thorns of earthly care, ambition, and pleasure, the seed has little chance to grow. All around the feeble stalks grow the hardier briers and thorns, whose hungry roots and stems absorb the soil's nourishment, leaving the wheat robbed and starved. There is much of such Christian life as this. Its possibilities are withered, stunted, choked to death by worldliness or by care. No fruit comes to anything beautiful in such lives.

It is discouraging to think that so much of the good seed sown comes to naught, fails through unfavorable conditions. Yet we should never falter in our sowing, praying God to watch over his own holy seed.

April 25.

Take heed therefore how ye hear— ST. LUKE viii. 18.

WE hear a great deal about the "fearful responsibility" of those who preach and teach the word of God. No doubt it is a solemn thing to speak for God to men. Those who are called to this duty should be very faithful. But there is also a "fearful responsibility" attached to hearing the word. One of our Lord's most earnest words was: "Take heed how ye hear."

When the preacher's work is done in the right way, his responsibility ceases, and that of the hearer begins. He has heard the truth; what will he do with it? Will he believe it and accept it? Or will he reject it? He cannot be again as if he had never heard it. It must be either a savor of life or a savor of death to him. Not only must he account for the opportunity of hearing, but he is also affected in his own spirit by the hearing. If he listens and yields to the influences of the truth, his heart grows softer; but if he rejects it, he is hardened by it.

No sermon or other message of truth, heard or read, leaves a man as it finds him. It makes some impression — what, is determined by what the hearer does with it. We need to think a little of this side of the responsibility. We are hearing much that is good these passing days; it would be sad if nothing came of it all.

There was the cloud and the darkness, yet gave it light by night. — EXODUS xiv. 20.

GOD appears different to his friends and to his enemies. To his own people he is light, comfort, joy, protection, and gladness; but to those who reject him he is darkness, awful terror, and stern judgment. The thought of God's presence fills the Christian with confidence and peace, with the warmth of love; but the same thought makes the unreconciled sinner tremble. "I thought upon God, and was troubled."

The providence of God, too, has this same double aspect. The Christian sees love everywhere. He sees his Father's hand ordering all things with loving wisdom. When he cannot understand he can trust and wait in confidence. But to the unreconciled man the same providence is a dark mystery, full of dread and alarm. He has no sense of safety anywhere he may go. There is no assurance of protection, no consciousness of love, anywhere in the universe for him.

Death to the ungodly is a heavy cloud, charged with lightnings and thunders; but to the Christian it is a glorious blaze of divine love pouring brightness and peace all about his bed. It will be the same on the day of judgment. To his own people Christ on his throne will be all glorious, and his appearance will give unspeakable joy; but to the ungodly his presence will be an appearance of the most appalling terror.

April 27.

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? — GENESIS xviii. 25.

SOME people worry about the fate of the heathen, and ask if God can be just and do so and so. A great deal better solution of such perplexities is Abraham's: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Surely we can trust him with all such things, and leave them in his hands.

Others have perplexity concerning the apparent want of justness in the allotments of earth. Some good people have little but trouble here, and some wicked people have very much worldly favor. We have the same truth on which to rest all such seeming inequities. God will surely do right. What we call trouble may have more real blessing in it than what we call prosperity. Then, the end of life is not here. God has eternity in which to adjust the equities.

There are other people who think that their own lot is very hard. They complain about their trials and disappointments, and are discontented with what God does for them and gives them. They say God is good; yet they imply by their querulousness that he is not good. This word of Abraham's should rebuke all such complaints. Sooner might the heavens fall than that in any smallest thing God could do aught but what is absolutely right and just.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord;
Trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

April 28.

When . . . the feet of the priests . . . were dipped in the brink of the water . . . the waters . . . stood, and rose up in one heap, a great way off . . . and the people passed over. — JOSHUA iii. 15, 16.

GOD does not open paths for us in advance of our coming. He does not promise to help before help is needed. He does not remove obstacles out of our way before we reach them. Yet when we are on the edge of our need, God's hand is stretched out.

Many people forget this, and are forever worrying about difficulties which they foresee in the future. They expect that God is going to make the way plain and open before them, miles and miles ahead, whereas he has promised to do it only step by step as they move on. There is a promise which reads: "*When thou passeth through* the waters, I will be with thee." You must get to the waters and into their floods before you can claim this promise.

Many people dread death, and lament that they have not "dying grace." Of course they will not have dying grace when they are in good health, in the midst of life's duties, with death far in advance. Why should they have it then? Grace for duty is what they need then, living grace; then dying grace when they come to die. When their feet are dipped in the brim of Jordan, the torrent will sink away.

April 29.

And Joshua said unto them, If thou be a great people, get thee up to the forest, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the Rephaim: since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for thee. — JOSHUA xvii. 15.

IT is the part of true wisdom to live our life in its actual conditions, not calculating what we could do or could be if we had certain other circumstances, but rather accepting the conditions in which we must live, and making them serve us with opportunities for being noble and doing worthy things. Says Robert Browning, —

> The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
> Is, not to fancy what were fair in life
> Provided it could be — but, finding first
> What may be, then find how to make it fair
> Up to our means. A very different thing.

The learning of this bit of practical wisdom will be worth more to many of us than any change of circumstances or conditions could be.

> "I like the man who faces what he must,
> With step triumphant and a heart of cheer;
> Who fights the daily battle without fear;
> Sees his hopes fail, yet keeps unfaltering trust
> That God is God, — that, somehow, true and just,
> His plans work out for mortals; not a tear
> Is shed when fortune, which the world holds dear,
> Falls from his grasp; better, with love, a crust,
> Than living in dishonor; envies not,
> Nor loses faith in man; but does his best,
> Nor ever murmurs at his humbler lot,
> But, with a smile and words of hope, gives zest
> To every toiler: he alone is great,
> Who by a life heroic conquers fate."

April 30.

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. — ST. JOHN xiii. 23.

I LIKE the word leaning. John leaned his weight on Jesus, on his breast, near his heart. We need to learn better our privilege of leaning, nestling, in the bosom of divine love. We think of giving a few of our burdens to Christ; but he wants to carry both us and all our load.

A gentleman was moving his library, and his boy was helping him. The child had gathered his arms full, and had gone off proudly with his load. Presently, however, the father heard a call for help. The little fellow had gotten half-way up the stairs when the burden proved too heavy, and he sank down. The father heard the call, and, coming up the stairs, lifted and carried both the boy and his load.

That is like what Jesus will do for us. He takes our sins, and puts them away. He takes our wicked heart, and changes it. He takes our ruined life, and restores it. He takes all our mistakes and sins, and corrects them. He takes into his hands the ordering of our steps, the shaping of our circumstances, the ruling and overruling of the events of our days, our deliverance in temptation. We really have nothing whatever to do with our own life but our simple duty day by day, hour by hour.

"In the light and pity of thy face
The burden melts away."

May 1.

This do in remembrance of me. — ST. LUKE xxii. 19.

A YOUNG man came to me one morning holding a letter in his hand. Opening it, he showed me some pressed flowers and leaves. "My sister gathered these from my mother's grave," he said, with a voice soft and tender. Then he told me about his mother, — her beautiful life, her deeds of self-denial, her loving counsels, her prayers, lingering especially on her long illness, when she faded like a flower.

"It was ten years ago," he said, "ten years ago, this very day, that she died; but it seems as if it were only yesterday." The faded flowers and leaves from her English grave had brought back the memories in all their vividness.

Perhaps you have in your home some memento of a departed friend. Every time you see it, it recalls your friend. This suggests why Jesus gave us the Last Supper. He would keep his love and death always fresh in our mind. "My people will forget me," he said, "and what I have suffered for them. The memory of my sacrifice will fade out as the years pass. I will give them this memorial, so that each time they take the bread and the cup they may freshly remember me." So all these centuries the Lord's Supper has kept the memory of the love and sacrifice of Christ fresh in the hearts of his people, and this memory has made all the world sweeter and gentler.

May 2.

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee. — GENESIS xii. 1.

ALL noble life begins with sacrifice. To gain the higher, the lower must be given up. We must get out of our own country, before we can get into God's country. We can have the better only by giving up the less valuable. God calls us all to leave the old, in order to enter the new. It may not be literally to leave country, kindred, and home, and go out into a strange land; but in a spiritual sense it always is just this. If we would follow Christ, we must cut loose from the world, and go out with him.

Perhaps there is too great a tendency in these days to try to follow Christ without cutting loose from the world. Too many people imagine that they can take the pilgrimage to Canaan without leaving Ur. But this is quite impossible. We can get to our land of promise only by leaving all, and following where Christ leads. This means that we must give up this world as our portion, and take the heavenly inheritance instead; we cannot keep both. The rich man who came to Christ could not sacrifice his earthly possessions, and therefore could not get the heavenly riches.

Faith shares the future's promise; love's
Self-offering is a triumph won;
And each good thought or action moves
The dark world nearer to the sun.

J. G. WHITTIER.

May 3.

I will bless thee . . . and be thou a blessing. — GENESIS xii. 2.

THAT is God's offer and message to all of us. He wants to bless us, and then he wants us in turn to be a blessing to others. God's way is to send very many of his good things through human mediators. When he would bless a little child, he puts a gift of wondrous love into a mother's heart. When he would bless a class of young people or children, he sends a teacher with a heart full of warm sympathy and earnest interest in life. When he would bless a community, he raises up a good man, and touches his heart, that he may scatter benefits among the people.

When God enriches us with gifts of whatever kind, he wants them to be blessings to others. Nothing that we have is ours for ourselves alone; we receive that we may dispense. When God gives a man money, he intends him to use it so as to make it a blessing to the world. When God bestows upon any one the gift of song, of eloquence, of the artist's power, he desires these gifts to be used to make men better and happier. We should never live for ourselves. We should seek always to live so as to make the world purer, truer, richer, sweeter.

He liveth long who liveth well;
All else is being flung away:
He liveth longest who can tell
Of true things truly done each day.

BONAR.

May 4.

Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. — GENESIS xxxii. 24.

WE are all having our Jabboks continually. We are coming face to face with wrestlers in the darkness. We go away from our wrestling, too, many a time, carrying the marks of wounding; and yet in the experience we have gotten blessing.

That touch on the hollow of Jacob's thigh was the touch that withered the old boasted strength. You say Jacob was victorious. Yes; but when? Not while he wrestled, but after his thigh was out of joint and he could wrestle no more. He wound his sinewy arms about the neck of his antagonist, and clung, saying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." That was the way he prevailed —not in the old way of cunning, but by having the old man crippled, defeated, and then by the new way of trust and clinging.

"Soul of mine,
Wouldst thou not choose for life a motto half divine?
Let this be thy guard and guide
Through the future, reaching wide:
Whether good or ill betide,
Rise higher.

From the mire
Where the masses blindly grovel, rise higher!
From the slavish love of gold,
From the justice bought and sold,
From the narrow rules of old,
Rise higher."

May 5.

So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts. — MATTHEW xviii. 35.

IF we have truly received the divine forgiveness, we will be forgiving toward others. As one says, "If you get pardon from God, you will give it to a brother; if you withhold it from your brother, you thereby make it manifest that you have not gotten it from God." So we are brought face to face with a most solemn practical teaching which we dare not ignore. Have we the forgiving spirit? Can we sincerely pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"? No doubt the lesson is hard, for it is so against nature; yet we all know by experience that the cherishing of resentment never brings peace to our hearts. People say, "Revenge is sweet;" but it is not true. It really makes bitterness for him who cherishes it. The gratification of a moment becomes pain afterward.

Revenge is a naked sword;
It has neither hilt nor guard.
Wouldst thou wield this brand of the Lord?
Is thy grasp then firm and hard?

But the closer thy clutch of the blade,
The deadlier blow thou wouldst deal,
Deeper wound in the hand is made —
It is thy blood reddens the steel.

And when thou hast dealt the blow —
When the blade from thy hand has flown —
Instead of the heart of the foe,
Thou mayst find it sheathed in thine own.

CHARLES HENRY WEBB.

There were some that had indignation . . . saying, To what purpose hath this waste of the ointment been made? — ST. MARK xiv. 4.

THERE are some who think every sacrifice for Christ's sake is a waste. They think that money which is given to build churches, or to send missionaries to the heathen, is wasted. They think that lives are wasted which are devoted to Christ and sacrificed in his service. But is it so? Is it really the money that is spent in advancing Christ's kingdom that is wasted? Are they the wasted lives that are emptied out in love for Christ? There is money that is wasted; but it is that which is used for selfish and sinful purposes, or squandered in the mere extravagances of worldliness. There are lives that are wasted; but they are those which are thrown away in evil courses, sacrificed in pleasure, in dissipation, in lust, in passion's fires.

Indeed, all lives are wasted which are not lost for Christ's sake; for did he not say, "He that saveth his life shall lose it"? To withhold one's life from Christ is therefore to waste it. It has been noted as very suggestive that our Lord uses the self-same word for "wasted" when he describes Judas as a "son of perdition." Judas had wasted that which was more precious than the ointment of spikenard, even the gift of eternal life which once had been within his reach. What we give to Christ is indeed all that we do not waste of our life and of our substance.

May 7.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: again I will say, Rejoice. — PHILIPPIANS iv. 4.

THE Bible insists upon joy as an element of Christian life. Christ spoke of his desire that the disciples should have his joy fulfilled in themselves. St. Paul exhorts Christians to rejoice always, and speaks of joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit.

Christian joy is not hilarity. One may be sorrowful, and yet have the joy of the Lord in the heart. It is an inner joy — a fountain in the heart, supplied from heaven. Every Christian should have this joy. It belongs to the ideal of the complete Christian character. It is very evident, however, that there are many Christians who do not have it. Their spirits go up and down like the mercury in the tube of the thermometer, varying with the atmosphere. When things are pleasant they have joy. When circumstances are hard or painful they have no joy.

We ought to know how to get the joy of Christ. One secret is absolute devotion to the will of God. Another is serving others. Only as we learn to live the life of love — "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister" — can we find true, deep joy. Every self-denial or sacrifice of love for another's sake adds to the Christian's joy. We reach the ideal life only as joy lives in our heart, and shines out in our life.

May 8.

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. — ST. MATTHEW vi. 28.

GOD looks up at us from every sweet flower that blooms. The beauty that fills our earth is a pledge to us of God's thought and love for us. We all know the familiar story of the great traveller who was saved from perishing on the desert where he had fallen, faint and famishing for water, by seeing a little speck of green moss peeping up out of the hot sand. This gleam of life assured him that God must be near, thus putting new hope into his heart, and giving him strength to rise and struggle on until he found water. Every plant or flower should remind us of God, make us reverent. A writer says, —

"We are not left of God
So long as a rose blooms at our window-pane;
So long as the sun shines, and the soft rain
Calls forth the early violets from the sod.
If but a wild brier by our pathway nod,
After its winter death wakened again,
Seeing its life we may forget our pain
Of unbelief. Who brings forth life but God?
He stains with tender tint the lily's lip;
Feeds with incessant care the insect crew;
Drops honey for the wandering bee to sip
In a white chalice set with pearls of dew.
The glow-worm hath its lamp; the firefly's light
Is but a pledge of love writ on the night."

May 9.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. — ISAIAH xl. 1.

COMFORT is a very sweet word. It has music in it for those who are in trouble. And most people have some trouble. This word was spoken first to captives. There are a great many captives — people carried away from home into a strange land. Many people are in bondage of sorrow; it is hard to find a home without its grief. Many are in bondage of circumstances; life is too hard for them. There is a great deal of poverty in the world. But here is God's gospel: "Comfort ye my people."

Few words are more misunderstood, however, than the Bible word comfort. Many people think it means mere condolence — to sit down with sufferers and weep with them, pitying them, but doing nothing to lift them up. But God's comfort is no such weak, sentimental thing as this. He never merely sits down with us in passive yielding to trouble. He comes to deliver us, to lead us out of our bondage, to make us victorious over trial or sorrow. There is always in Bible comfort the thought of strength. No bondage is hopeless under the skies of divine love. The stars shine into the deepest dungeon. There is not in any prison in this world a captive to whom the gospel does not come with its "Speak ye comfortably."

May 10.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. — ISAIAH lv. 8.

IT is well indeed that God's ways differ from ours. For example, if God's forgiveness were like ours it would do us little good. We hold our petty grudges and resentments; we remember men's smallest unkindnesses to us, allowing them to imbitter our love, and stop the flow of our affections. We profess to forgive, but retain the grudge in our heart.

But God's ways of forgiving are not as our ways. He forgives the worst of sinners, the greatest of sins, and the largest number of transgressions. In the parable, it was God who forgave the ten thousand talents; and it was a man who would not forgive his fellow the miserable pittance of a hundred pence. The most wonderful thing in this universe is God's forgiveness. We ought to be thankful for it; for if it were less we could not be saved. Then, when we have received it, we ought to let its spirit work in our heart, to change us into its own image. We pray, "Forgive us as we forgive." If we mean this, we should look well to the kind of forgiveness we show to others."

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
 However dark it be:
Lead me by thine own hand,
 Choose out the path for me,
Smooth let it be or rough,
 It will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it leads
 Right onward to thy rest.

BONAR.

May 11.

I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat . . . sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. — ST. MATTHEW XXV. 42, 43.

NOT the doing of things they ought not to have done here determines the doom of the unrighteous, but the not doing of things they ought to have done. They had not been cruel or unkind to any of Christ's little ones — no such charge is made. They had not wronged any one. Only neglects are mentioned. They had seen "little ones" hungry, and had not fed them; thirsty, and had not given them drink; naked, and had not clothed them; sick, and had not visited them. They had merely "passed by on the other side" when they saw human need and misery which they might have relieved. Yet their omissions and neglects count as actual sins.

Many of us are apt to neglect opportunities of helping others and of relieving distress, never thinking that we are sinning against Christ; that is, are leaving him unhelped and unrelieved in distress, when we might have given him comfort. The result of the teaching should be to make us more thoughtful of others, and more alert to embrace every opportunity of ministry to others in Christ's name. It is because we do not think that we fail so often in love's duty.

"And yet it was never in my soul,
To play so ill a part;
But evil is wrought by want of thought
As well as want of heart."

May 12.

But judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block in his brother's way. — ROMANS xiv. 13.

INSTEAD of keeping our eye ever on others, looking for faults and mistakes in them, we are to look to our own example, lest something we do may hurt others' lives, or cause them to do wrong. If every one would do this, it would go far toward making a paradise of this world of thorns and briers. We easily get in the habit of overlooking our own faults, or imagining that we are well-nigh perfect, while in reality our life is full of inconsistencies. We dash at our neighbor's eye, to pull out some little mote we imagine we see in it, while at the same time we have a great beam in our own eye which sadly disfigures us, and is a reproach to us in the sight of others.

The habit of judging and condemning others is usually a great deal more serious blemish than are the things we so glibly point out as flaws or faults. The first duty of every Christian is to make sure that he lays no stumbling-block in others' way. It is said that Rutherford B. Hayes did not carry a watch. When he was a young man his watch was twice stolen, and the thief each time was arrested and imprisoned. Mr. Hayes then resolved never to wear a watch, because twice his carrying one had made a temptation for another. We may call this excessive conscientiousness, but we can scarcely overdo in this duty.

May 13.

Who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. — 1 PETER i. 5.

IT is related of a saintly man, that by his own request his only epitaph was "Kept." We are all kept, if we do not fall away into the darkness of eternal death, by the power of God unto final salvation. Only those who overcome at last get home to glory. Only Christ can help us to be conquerors. And important as was his death for us, his real work in saving us is that which he does with us, one by one, in keeping us, guiding us, giving us grace for living, lifting us up when we have fallen, bringing us back when we have wandered away. Were it not for the patient, watchful, never-wearying love of Christ, not one of us would ever get home. We are kept.

This divine keeping comes to us in many ways. We believe in angel guardianship. Then there is human guardianship. The mother is her child's first keeper. Robert Browning says that even "angels are less tenderwise than God and mothers;" and the old rabbis used to say that God could not be everywhere present, and therefore he made mothers. All through life God gives human guardians who become helpers of our faith. Then we have ever the real divine presence in which we find perfect keeping. "The Lord is thy keeper."

I am come down to deliver them . . . and to bring them . . . unto a good land. — EXODUS iii. 8.

WEEPING may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. The night may grow very dark, but the morning will break. "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God;" but notice the word "through." "The valley of the shadow of death" lies in the path; but we are to pass through it, and beyond comes, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." After Egypt and its bondage comes the "good land and large." So it is always. After winter, with its death and desolation, comes spring with its flowers, fruits, harvests, and life. After earth with its sorrows, comes heaven, where joy shall be eternal.

"After the shower the tranquil sun;
After the snow the emerald leaves;
Silver stars when the day is done;
After the harvest the golden she aves.

After the clouds the violet sky;
After the tempest the lull of waves;
Quiet woods when the winds go by;
After the battle, peaceful graves.

After the knell the wedding-bells;
After the bud the radiant rose;
Joyful greetings from sad farewells;
After our weeping, sweet repose.

After the burden the blissful meed;
After the flight the downy rest;
After the furrow the waking seed;
After the shadowy river — rest!"

May 15.

Bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there. — JUDGES vii. 4.

THE way the men drank water from the brook was the test of their fitness for the work of conquering the Midianites. It seemed to make the smallest difference in the world whether a soldier drank by bowing down with his face in the water, or by lapping up the water with his hand as he stood; yet it was a difference that settled the question of fitness or unfitness for the great work before the army.

It is in just such little ways, and in such matters of everyday and commonplace action, conduct, and manner, that God is always testing us and deciding whether we are fit or unfit for the greater work for which he is seeking men. By the way a boy lives at home, by the way he treats his parents, by the way he performs his duties at school, by the spirit he shows on the play-ground, by the diligence or the want of it which he displays in the store or office in which he is first employed — by the way he acts in all these relations and duties, the question is being settled to what greater responsibilities the Lord will call him in after-days. Every young girl, by the way she deports herself in her girlhood, at home, at school, at play, and in all the days of youth, is settling the place in life she shall fill in full womanhood and strength. We cannot know what future honor may depend on the way we do the simplest, most commonplace thing to-day.

May 16.

Therefore the children of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. — JOSHUA vii. 12.

THIS is the only record in the Book of Joshua of a lost battle. The word "therefore" tells us that it was a sin that caused this defeat, a secret sin, and the sin, too, of but one individual. How little do we know of the real causes of the failures we see about us!

All of us have our Ais, too, our defeats in battle; and very often they come just after our Jerichos. It was only a little town, too, at which this disaster occurred, so small that it was thought unnecessary to send more than a handful of soldiers to take it. Is it not often just so in our spiritual warfare? One writes, "Our greatest failures often happen in the little things of life. We miscalculate the strength of the foe; we fail to spy out the reserved forces. Indeed, we mistake, when we think it an easy matter to subdue any enemy. How often has it happened that he who has won his most signal victory in some great crisis of the church, who has rescued the truth from the teachers of false doctrine, or stormed the intrenchments of vice, has forthwith failed in some petty domestic disturbance, in some social duty, or in a trifling claim of common charity? If there be a time in life when we need more than ever to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation, it is in the hour of success."

The Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him. — EXODUS xvi. 8.

"DOES God really hear every discontented word I ever speak? Does he hear when I grumble about the weather, about the hard winter, about the late spring, about the dry summer, about the wet harvest, about the grub-worm and the grasshopper? Does he hear when I grumble about the frosts, about the drought, about the high winds, and about the storms? Does he hear when I scold about my circumstances, about the hardness of my lot, about my losses and disappointments?"

If we could get into our heart, and keep there continually, the consciousness that every word we speak is heard up in heaven, would we murmur so much as we now do? We are very careful of our speech before men. We are always on our guard when we think anybody is within hearing, and speak only proper words. Are we as careful what we say in the hearing of heaven? We are careful, too, never to speak words which would give pain to the hearts of those we love. Are we as careful not to say anything that will grieve our heavenly Father?

If the world seems cold to you,
 Kindle fires to warm it;
Let their comfort hide from view
 Winters that deform it.
Hearts as frozen as your own
 To that radiance gather:
You will soon forget to moan
 "Ah, the cheerless weather!"

LUCY LARCOM.

All the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands. — EXODUS XXXV. 25.

IT didn't spoil their hands a bit either. Some dainty women "toil not, neither do they spin." They keep their hands soft and white. They think any kind of work would mar the delicate beauty of their fingers. But they make a great mistake. The hands that are beautiful in heaven's sight are not the dainty ones that are never roughened or hardened by toil. Anything is beautiful just in the measure in which it fulfils the mission for which it was made. Hands were made to work; and an idle, useless hand, no matter how delicate and fair, is not a lovely hand.

"Beautiful hands are those that do
Work that is earnest and brave and true,
Moment by moment, the long day through."

These ancient women had learned to spin, and now they spun for God. Here we see how every-day gifts and occupations may be turned over into God's service. The young women of to-day do not spin much — many of them never saw a distaff or a spinning-wheel; but they have other common acquirements which they may consecrate to Christ.

"The sweetest lives are those to duty wed,
Whose deeds, both great and small,
Are close-knit strands of an unbroken thread,
Where love ennobles all.
The world may sound no trumpets, ring no bells;
The book of life the shining record tells."

May 19.

And brought . . . the blue, and the purple, the scarlet, and the fine linen. — EXODUS XXXV. 25.

WHEN the ancient Hebrews were preparing to make a tabernacle for God, they brought the richest and best things they had. They looked on their heirlooms and their most prized possessions, and took out for God the things that were dearest and most sacred.

We should follow the same rule when we are giving to God or for God. When we make presents to those we love tenderly, we are at great pains to get the best and loveliest gifts we can find. But do we always bring Christ the best? Do we give him the best of our heart's affections? Do we bring him the best of our life, — our youth, our energy, our most vigorous powers? Do we do our best work in his service? Are our gifts for him the most precious things we possess?

These Israelites brought their bracelets, ear-rings, and rings, and all their jewels of gold. They had nothing that was too good or too precious to be offered to God. Is it thus with us? Do not we sometimes bring to God the very smallest gifts we can find? We keep for ourselves the bright gold and the large bills, and give him the nickels and pennies. So of our time, of our thought, our skill, our energy. We put him off too often with what is left over, when we have served ourselves.

Thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments.—EXODUS xl. 13.

ONE feature of the high priest's dress was very suggestive. On each shoulder, in the golden clasp that fastened together the two parts of the ephod, was an onyx stone, on which were engraved the names of six of the tribes of Israel. Thus, in an emblematic way, the high priest bore the people on his shoulder, the place of strength. He was a type of Christ; thus Christ carries his people on his shoulder, bearing them and their burdens.

Another feature of this dress was the breastplate which was worn by the high priest. It had in it twelve precious stones, with the names of the twelve tribes engraved on them. This the priest wore on his breast over his heart. When he went in before God he thus represented all the people. He not only carried them on his shoulder, for support and upholding, but near his heart, for affection. So Christ carries his people in his heart, in deep, tender, unchanging love. Thus we are sure of both the strength and the love of Christ in our interest.

"He bears the names of all his saints
Deep on his heart engraved;
Attention to the states and wants
Of all his love has saved.

In him my weary soul has rest,
Though I am weak and vile;
I read my name upon his breast,
And see the Father smile."

May 21.

Dead flies cause the ointment of the perfumer to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor. — ECCLESIASTES X. 1.

IT is sad to see how some strong and noble characters are marred by little, yet grievous, faults and blemishes. One man is generous, but he desires always to have his charity praised. Another is disposed to be kind and helpful, but by his manner hurts or humiliates the one he befriends. Another is unselfish and devout, but is careless of promises and engagements. He makes appointments, and never thinks of them again. He borrows money, and does not repay it. His friends say, "He is so forgetful!" Yes; but how his forgetfulness mars his character and hurts his influence! Forgetfulness is worse than an amiable weakness; it is a sin.

Whenever self crops out in conduct or disposition, it is a dead fly in the ointment. Untruthfulness is a blot in all eyes. It makes little difference that a person is not intentionally at fault in the things that so mar his life. Carelessness and thoughtlessness are themselves such serious moral blemishes that they make impossible any excuse for delinquencies resulting from them. We need to look to the infinitesimals that make perfection or mar it. No fault is too small to be worth curing, and no fragment of beauty is too small to be worth setting in the mosaic of character.

May 22.

He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. — PSALM cxlvii. 3.

IT is said that when one branch of a tree is bruised, all the tree begins to pour of its life toward the wounded place, to restore it. Is it not thus that Christ does when one of his own is bruised by sorrow? "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

There are fields where once fierce battles raged, great armies contended, and blood flowed, but where now the birds sing sweet songs, in summer days flowers bloom, meadows are green with waving grass, and ripening harvests bend. So there are homes where once sorrow's dark clouds hung, tears flowed, and cries of grief were heard, but where now joyous songs ring out, and glad faces smile. God's comfort has healed the waste.

There are many ways in which God restores sorrow's devastation. He sends new blessings instead of the old which he took away, as new flowers come in place of those that fade. He hides a blessing, too, in the very heart of the sorrow itself. Grief is like the cloud which comes with its dark portents into the blue summer sky. It blots out the blue, and fills the air with terrors. The lightnings flash, the thunders roll; but out of the bosom of the blackness pours the soft rain. So sorrow's cloud comes with dark, portentous aspect; but it empties blessings upon the life, thus carrying in itself its own power of restoration.

When saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? — ST. MATTHEW XXV. 39.

TRUE goodness is not conscious of itself. Moses wist not that his face shone. The noblest Christians put the lowest value on their own good works. No doubt many of the commendations and rewards of the righteous in the judgment will be surprises to them. They keep no record of their own good deeds. Their own sense of personal unworthiness hinders their seeing anything worthy in their ministrations.

Besides, we do not see Christ in the lowly and the suffering ones who come before us needing love and help; we see only poor, sick, unfortunate people, with no outshining of glory, no hints of nobility, no marks of heavenly beauty. There is a picture which, seen in ordinary light, shows only a very poor man dying in a miserable garret, with tokens of abject poverty on all sides; but seen in another light it represents a throng of angels waiting to bear a child of God up to glory. We do not see things as they are. Jesus himself is ever before us in lowly disguise. We are unconsciously serving the Master himself whenever we do in his name the lowly things of love. Every consecrated Christian is preparing for himself many a blessed surprise of reward and glory when he enters the fuller, richer life of heaven, where all the results of service and all the fruits of kindness shall be revealed.

That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. — ST. JOHN iii. 6.

LIKE produces like. To be born of the Spirit is to have a new life imparted by the Spirit. This new life will be like that which produces it. Every one who is born of God will have some features of God's likeness. He will love the things that God loves, and hate the things that God hates. He will be like God in holiness, in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in forgiveness, in truthfulness, in love.

If we would know what God is like we have only to look at Jesus Christ, for he was the image of God; and if we are born again, we shall have the same features in our lives. They will be dim at first; but they will come out clearer and clearer each day, as we go on.

We can tell whether or not we are born again by looking closely at ourselves to see if we have the marks of the Spirit in our life. Do we hate sin? Do we love holiness? Do we love the Bible and prayer and the services of the church and the Lord's Supper?

We have the same thought presented by St. Paul under the figure of the seal. Christians are sealed by the Spirit. The seal impresses its own features on the wax. So the Holy Spirit seals believers by stamping his own image on their hearts. Those who have received the Spirit will bear the marks of his beauty in their lives.

May 25.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. — GALATIANS v. 22.

THE sum of all practical religion is love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." All Christian growth is to be toward the likeness of Christ, and all his character is summed up in love. Whatever is unloving in us is un-Christian; and we should seek to overcome the evil with good. Perhaps the ordinary Christian conscience has not been sufficiently exacting on this line of character and duty. It demands truthfulness, justice, honesty, purity; but does it not too easily tolerate bad temper, resentment, and other phases of unamiableness, in those who are professing Christians?

Pour forth the oil, — pour boldly forth;
It will not fail until
Thou failest vessels to provide,
Which it may freely fill.

But then, when such are found no more,
Though flowing broad and free
Till then, and nourished from on high,
It straightway stanched will be.

Dig channels for the streams of Love,
Where they may broadly run;
And Love has overflowing streams
To fill them every one.

For we must share if we would keep
That good thing from above;
Ceasing to give, we cease to have, —
Such is the law of Love.

R. C. TRENCH.

May 26.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. — REVELATION i. 10.

WE should all seek to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. During the week we have our cares of business, and our hands are full of work that must be done. The world is apt to get into our heart during the week-days; and if there is no break in this secular life, we are apt to become secularized in spirit, losing interest in spiritual things. The trouble is not that we are in the world, but that the world too often gets into us. It is a proper enough thing for a ship to be in the sea; but when the sea gets into the ship there is an end of sailing, and the ship sinks into the waters. Christ wants us to be in the world, but he does not want the world to get into us.

On the Lord's day, therefore, we should run our bark just as completely as possible out of the world's troubled waters into the peaceful bay of spiritual rest and enjoyment. We should think on spiritual things, and seek to have our heart thoroughly cleansed of worldliness and filled with God. One who thus faithfully uses the Lord's day each week will be safe amid the world's unspiritual influences. A well-spent Sabbath will keep up the tone of the life amid the most intense pressure of week-day duty. But there is no other antidote to worldliness; and no Christian who desires to be faithful dare lose the Sabbaths out of his week.

May 27.

Learn a parable of the fig tree. — ST. MARK xiii. 28.

THE parable of the fig-tree teaches that we should not shut our eyes to the foreshadowings of future things. We are taught not to be anxious about to-morrow. But there is also a duty of looking ahead as well as not looking ahead. The good sailor watches the skies, and he would be criminally foolish were he to pay no heed to the foretokens of storm. The prudent farmer watches the forerunners of winter, and gathers in his fruits, houses his cattle, puts wood and coal in his bins, when he can do so easily, and is ready before the snows and the bitter cold come. So in all our life we should watch the "signs of the times," and shape our course accordingly.

Young people, as they feel the impulses of life in their souls, and hear the calls of God sounding in their ears, should be reminded of the duties and responsibilities of life, toward which they are moving, and should diligently prepare themselves for filling well their place. Each period of life brings its own special work; and there are always forecasts which, if heeded, will enable us to prepare ourselves for what God is preparing for us. If we are faithful, one day will prepare us for the next, and we shall never be found by any event, however sudden, unprepared to meet it.

The elders . . . came to meet him trembling, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord. — 1 SAMUEL xvi. 4, 5.

GOD'S messengers do not all wear gentle faces; ofttimes they come in a garb of sternness. Yet they come always with a blessing. Sickness is one of these dark-visaged prophets. We cannot welcome it. Yet if we ask this messenger, "Comest thou peaceably?" the answer is, "Yes, peaceably." It brings always messages of peace, of good, if only we have grace to receive them.

The same is true of all hardness. We would rather have easy times. Boys and young men who are poor think ofttimes that they have scarcely a fair chance in life, when they see the sons of rich fathers revelling in luxury, with plenty of money. Yet really the stern prophet of poverty brings ofttimes a holier message and a richer, truer blessing than the smiling-faced, silken-robed messenger brings to the youth in the fine mansion. The best things in life can be developed only by work and discipline. Hence, whatever compels a boy or a young man to toil, to deny himself, to depend on his own efforts, is a blessing to him. The prophet of necessity therefore comes to him peaceably. We should never turn from our doors any prophets God sends, however stern they may appear. They all come with a good message.

I will send thee to Jesse . . . I have provided me a king among his sons. — 1 SAMUEL xvi. 1.

THE Lord is never at loss for a man. When one fails he has another ready. His plans and purposes go on in spite of human failure, and through all seeming disaster.

Here was a boy, keeping the sheep in the fields, probably not dreaming of greatness, and yet God had him marked out to be king. The boys do not know what God has in mind for them. They may be sure, however, that for every one of them he has some plan. It may be a great place or a small one, as the world rates greatness or smallness; but every boy should feel that to be just what God made him to be is the grandest, noblest, best thing possible for him. If God made him to be a carpenter, and by his own restless strivings he gets to be a member of Congress or Parliament, or President of the United States, his place is not half so high and great in the angels' sight as if he had been the carpenter he was meant to be.

The greatest place any one can attain is the place God intended him to fill. How can we know what God wants us to do and to be? By doing his will, day by day, with quiet fidelity, wherever we find ourselves. God's will for each day is God's plan for us for that day. Thus God will lead us continually to that which he has for us to do. Failure in the lowlier duties will hinder our promotion to the higher.

Then David ran, and stood over the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. — 1 SAMUEL xvii. 51.

IF he had not, the old champion would have gotten up by and by and walked away; for he was only stunned, not killed, by the stone. David made sure work of his victory.

A great many of our attacks upon sin in our own hearts and in the world only stun and do not kill the evil. We walk away, thinking we have done a fine thing; and presently we meet the old giant again, stalking abroad as before. He soon recovers from our blow, and we have to fight the battle over; and perhaps we fight it again in the same half way, and thus on and on to the end of life. Most of us have had just such experience as this with our own lusts and passions. We overcome them very often, and think each time that we are through with them, but soon again they are active as ever.

We need to learn a lesson from David, and finish our victories by cutting off the head of every giant we strike down. There is no other way of killing sins. The life is in the head, and the head must be struck off or the enemy will be facing us again in a day or two with but a scar on his forehead. The only way to get a real victory over vices is to decapitate them. Bruises are not enough. There must be thorough work done, in the name of the Lord. Half-way measures will not avail.

David . . . said before Jonathan . . . what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? — 1 SAMUEL XX. 1.

A FRIEND is a refuge. We all have troubles at some time. For many years we may get along quietly, and without sore trial; but the day will come to all of us when we shall be in sorrow or danger. It may be in such an experience as David's, when people shall misjudge us, or become our enemies without cause, and may seek to harm us. It may be sickness that comes upon us, or bereavement, or loss of some kind. Whatever the trouble may be, a true friend will prove a great comfort to us in the experience.

It is a blessed thing to have one friend that we are sure of, though all others fail us. We can go to him then as David went to Jonathan, telling him all our heart's burden. Young people should seek to have a friend older than themselves, to whom they can fly in trouble or in danger, and in whose faithful love they can find a sure and safe refuge. There is a wonderful strength in the confidence that one has such a friend.

Christ is the best, strongest, truest, most helpful friend any one can have. His friendship is a refuge indeed. We can flee to him in any danger, and find him ready always to comfort, shelter, and bless. However many human friends we may have, we all need Christ.

Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father. — 1 SAMUEL xix. 4.

ONE quality of true friendship is the loyalty which speaks out for one's friend in his absence, when derogatory things are said of him. In few ways is human infirmity shown in worse light than in the too common willingness to hear evil things even of one's friends. Must we confess that there is something in a great deal of human nature which delights in learning of faults, mistakes, or lapses in others? At least we must admit that there is a strong tendency in this direction.

But we ought to set the world the example of a friendship free from such malign weakness. We ought to refuse to believe evil of our friend, or even to listen to whispers or insinuations against him. Instead of being delighted at hearing injurious things about him, hints of wrong-doing in him, or of flaws in his character, such things should grieve us. The law of Christian love requires us to defend the character of our friend as we would our own character. We are our brother's keeper. One writes: —

Say not, "It matters not to me;
My brother's weal is his behoof."
For in this wondrous human web,
If your life's warp, his life is woof.

Woven together are the threads,
And you and he are in one loom;
For good or ill, for glad or sad,
Your lives must share one common doom.

June 2.

Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee. — 1 SAMUEL xx. 4.

FRIENDSHIP is helpful. We never know what our friends do for us. They are advocates for us, speaking strong, earnest words for us to others. They defend us from false things which others may speak of us. Since I began to write this paragraph I have had an opportunity to tell the truth about one of my friends to another who had heard certain charges against him, thus removing the false impression concerning my friend at least from one man's mind. None of us know how much of our success we owe to the loyal words of our friends.

Friends help us in our personal life. A pure-hearted friend is continually leaving touches of beauty on our character. We get from him good thoughts, wholesome influences, fresh inspirations, continual incitements. Longfellow tells us of a song breathed in the air which he found long, long afterward in the heart of a friend. So it is continually with the sweet songs, good words, and holy influences of friendship.

Friends are helpful also in the ministry of kindness which they render as two walk on together. A true friend is unselfish, thoughtful, ready always to render aid in every possible way. Especially should friendship show itself in time of trouble. "A friend is born for adversity."

June 3.

The men . . . said . . . Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand. — 1 SAMUEL xxiv. 4.

SO far as we know, the Lord had not said this at all. The men put their own interpretation on the opportunity, and called it providential. We are all too apt to interpret providences in accordance with our own wishes. When we are desiring to be led in a certain manner, and there is one way we desire very much to take, we are quite sure to find providences that seem to favor our preference.

But opportunity does not always indicate duty. When the merchant by mistake gives back a dollar too much change, there is an opportunity to make a dollar; but who will say that we ought to accept it? When you find in trouble one who has done you a wrong, there is an opportunity to have revenge. But does the opportunity justify retaliation? The duty in the former case is honesty, and in the latter is the showing of love to an enemy.

In reading providences we must remember that no opportunity to do anything in itself wrong is ever to be regarded as a divine leading. It is a sin to take revenge, no matter how much our enemy deserves punishment, or how good a chance we have for punishing him. It is a sin to steal, even though an opportunity makes it very easy to do it. God leads us by his providence, but never into sin.

June 4.

Wherefore hearkenest thou to men's words? — 1 SAMUEL xxiv. 9.

THERE was some one who in the dark was stabbing David's name. It is probable that Saul was made to believe that David was his bitter foe, and was plotting all manner of evil against him. There are people in every community who are quite as bad as the man Cush. They go to this one and that one, and drop dark insinuations about some other person, whose shoe's latchet they are not worthy to unloose. They come to one of two friends, and let fall some hint only that the other is not faithful as a friend, perhaps relating something in a perverted way, so as to leave an impression of faithlessness. "A whisper separateth chief friends." The ruin wrought by the slanderer in this world cannot be computed, — characters blackened, friendships broken up, jealousies aroused, homes destroyed, hearts broken. Slanderous words have measureless power for evil.

"A whisper broke the air —
A soft, light tone, and low,
Yet barb'd with shame and woe!
Now might it perish only there,
Nor farther go!

Ah, me! a quick and eager ear
Caught up the little-meaning sound!
Another voice then breathed it clear,
And so it wandered round
From ear to lip, from lip to ear,
Until it reached a gentle heart, —
And *that* it broke."

The Lord forbid that I should do this thing.— 1 SAMUEL xxiv. 6.

"WOULD it not be manly to resent it?" said one who had received an insult. "Yes," was the reply, "but it would be godlike to forgive it." David did the godlike thing. He had a chance to avenge himself. He had his cruel enemy in his power. One stroke, and Saul would never have troubled him any more. David's life would then have been safe. He would have become king at once. His men were urging it, and he himself was tempted to do it. Yet he overcame the temptation, and allowed Saul to pass out of his hand unharmed. He listened to the voice of God speaking in his own conscience, and restrained the impulse to avenge himself.

The first impulse of a child, when wronged or hurt by another, is to seek revenge. Sometimes older persons encourage this spirit in children by telling them to whip the chair or the rocking-horse by which they have chanced to be hurt. In older people, too, the desire for revenge is natural, and can be repressed only by the higher law of love which Christ teaches. The lesson is, that the punishment of sin must be left in God's hands. Our duty is to bear patiently the wrongs and injuries others may inflict upon us, not giving reviling for reviling, to repay unkindness with kindness, to overcome evil with good.

I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. — 1 SAMUEL xxiv. 10.

DAVID seemed now to have a short, quick way to the kingdom, but he would not dare to take it. Now the throne was Saul's — he was the Lord's anointed. David would not lift a finger to hurry God's providence, and to become king before God made him king. There often are things that God intends to give us, but which we must wait to receive in his way. Short-cuts in life's paths are always mistakes in the end. Jacob's mother knew that Jacob was to have the blessing of the firstborn, but if she had waited it would have come to him without being stained as it was by her own and Jacob's deception.

Young men are ambitious, and their ambition may be right; but too often they are in such feverish haste to reach what they wish that they take the short-cut of dishonesty to get the sooner to the coveted place. It never pays. David could have been on the throne the next day, but he would have left stains of guilt on the steps as he ascended; it was better far for him to wander on in exile for a time longer, and then reach the throne by a clean path. It is pleasant to see young men get on in life; but we must always ask how they have gotten on, to know whether their elevation is really an honor. The only way to true success is God's way. We must learn to wait for God.

The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. — 1 SAMUEL xxiv. 12.

THERE are apt to be wrong views about bearing injuries. People ask, "Is there to be no justice in cases like David's? Must we quietly bear wrong? and must the person who does the wrong never receive any punishment?" Our sense of right is sometimes so outraged that our soul cries out in remonstrance, when we are told that we never should resent nor resist, but turn the other cheek when one cheek has been smitten. The Bible teaching is, that it is not our part to punish those who wrong us. Our clumsy hands are not skilful enough to adjust such delicate matters.

We are not required to say that a certain person's treatment of us was beautiful when it was manifestly wrong, but we are to recognize the truth that the question of justice is God's matter, not ours; that our part is to be patient and meek, leaving in God's hands the whole adjustment of right and wrong.

Two Scripture passages help to make this plain: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." We should meekly endure, and commit all to God.

Then David the king went in, and sat before the Lord. — 2 SAMUEL vii. 18.

WE can get before the Lord anywhere by shutting our eyes to the world and looking up into our Father's face. Even in a crowd we can be really alone with God. We can commune with him, too, in his works. Sweet wayside flowers whisper to us tender thoughts of God. The sea tells us of his power. The deep blue sky has its suggestions of God's peace. The mountains speak of his stability and unchangeableness.

But there are other ways of going in before God. When we enter into our closet of prayer and shut the door, we are in a very real sense sitting before him. We open our Bible, and look into its pages with reverent heart and with open ear; and as we read the sacred words, God talks to us. We bow in prayer; and we are lying at Christ's very feet, so close to him that we can reach the hem of his garment, and feel the touch of his hand upon our fevered hearts. How near we get to our Saviour in such moments, and how his touch thrills us!

"O Saviour Christ, thou too art man;
Thou hast been troubled, tempted, tried;
Thy kind but searching glance can scan
The very wounds that shame would hide.

Thy touch has still its ancient power;
No word from thee can fruitless fall.
Hear, in this solemn evening hour,
And in thy mercy heal us all."

June 9.

David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done perversely: but these sheep, what have they done? — 2 SAMUEL xxiv. 17.

IT is human and very common to try to lay the blame on others when we have sinned. Compare Saul's conduct when Samuel accused him of disobedience in sparing the king and the best spoil of the Amalekites: he charged the blame on the people. How much nobler is David's behavior in this case! The sin had not been his alone, but he sees only his own share in it. He sees the people suffering under a heavy stroke which he feels he ought to be bearing himself, and he cries to God to lift his hand from them and let it fall upon him.

The lesson is for all of us. We should never try to shift the blame of our sins or mistakes upon others, but should take it upon ourselves. If penalties or sufferings come through our misdoings we should bear them, and not allow them to fall upon innocent persons while we escape.

Another thing to notice here is, that David's penitence deepened under the divine judgment. Some people grow rebellious when chastened; but the true way, when we have sinned and when punishment comes, is to creep closer to God, and to get down lower before him. This is the spirit that pleases God and receives blessing from his hand.

The Lord . . . which had appeared unto him twice. —1 KINGS xi. 9.

MATTHEW HENRY says: "God keeps account of the gracious visits he makes us, whether we do or not, knows how often he has appeared to us, and for us, and will remember it against us, if we turn from him." Every such gracious visit to us adds to our responsibility for obedience and holy service.

A sculptor had a vision of Christ, which he reproduced in marble. He believed that he had seen the Christ in a dream, and that the form he had chiselled in the marble was the very image of the glorious Person who had appeared to him. Afterward the sculptor was asked to make statues of certain heathen deities. But he refused, saying, "A man who has made the image of the Christ would commit sacrilege if he were to employ his art in the carving of pagan goddesses. My art is henceforth a consecrated thing."

When Solomon had seen the Lord in vision, he should have been forever a consecrated man. The eyes which had looked upon the Lord should never have lusted after earth's pleasures. The hands which had fashioned a temple for God should never have built chapels and altars for heathen deities. Solomon's sins were far greater because of the special favors God had granted to him. Seeing Christ should set us apart forever for holy living.

June 11.

In thy days I will not do it, for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. — 1 KINGS xi. 12.

IN this word of God we have a double illustration of the way our lives cast shadows. A good man transmits blessings to his children, and one who turns away from God robs his children of blessings that ought to be theirs. David's good life kept from Solomon the visitation of the full consequences of Solomon's sin.

There are many of us who are enjoying blessings which have come through the faithfulness of our fathers. But there are many who, like Solomon, live so as to rob their children of the honors and privileges which they ought to transmit to them.

Solomon's son did not get the kingdom of all Israel. He received but a fragment of it, and it was his father's fault that the kingdom was divided. The man who by indolence or extravagance wastes the fortune God has given him, and transmits poverty or beggary to his children, is guilty of a like sin. Still more guilty is he who by wrong or shameful living brings dishonor upon his own name, and thus bequeaths a heritage of dishonor to his descendants. It is not merely our own life which is affected by our conduct; we are so tied up in bundles that others are made or unmade by our making or unmaking of ourselves. We are under the most sacred obligations to live worthily, so that we hurt not but bless those coming after us.

June 12.

I will sing a new song unto thee, O God. — PSALM cxliv. 9.

RUSKIN says, "Many mighty harmonies have been discoursed by instruments that had been dumb or discordant, but that God knew their stops." This is very true, and is most encouraging to those who are conscious of the imperfection of their own lives. One says, "I never can live a truly sweet or beautiful life, for sin has so marred my soul and jangled all its chords." True, but God can take the instrument with the broken keys and the discordant strings and put it in perfect repair — "He restoreth my soul;" and under his touch and his breath it may give out music that will thrill men's hearts, and delight the angels and God himself.

The worst tempered people may be made gentle and loving in speech, act, and disposition, by the transforming power of divine grace. The selfish nature may be tuned into sweetest unselfishness and charity. So with all jangled life-keys. God can put them in tune if we will but leave them in his skilful hands. The possibilities of beautiful living in even the most marred and imperfect souls are almost infinite. None need ever despair who will accept the divine grace, and profit by the divine teaching and discipline.

"The hours of pain have yielded good
Which prosperous days refused;
As herbs, though scentless when entire,
Spread fragrance when they're bruised."

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. — PSALM xix. 7.

THE works of God declare his glory, but not his will. We could never learn by studying the stars, the flowers, or the rocks, how we ought to live, what is right, and what is wrong. We could never learn what God himself is, what his attributes are, how he feels toward us. We may learn from his works that he is great, wise, unchanging, good; but we could not learn that he loves us with a tender, personal affection. We could never find a gospel of salvation for lost sinners in the works of God.

How thankful we should be for his word, which tells us all these things! It teaches us how to live. It is a perfect law; not perfect only in that it is without flaw or mistake, but also in that it is complete as a revelation, containing all we need to know to be saved and to reach the full stature of perfect men. We may turn to the law of the Lord with every question of duty, and we shall always find the right answer.

I worship thee, sweet will of God,
And all thy ways adore;
And every day I live I seem
To love thee more and more.

He always wins who sides with God,
To him no chance is lost;
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

F. W. FABER.

June 14.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. — PSALM xix. 8.

MANY people think that a good life must be a sad and gloomy life. They suppose that Christians have no joy. They have to deny themselves many pleasures. They have to live strictly and soberly. They have to keep the Sabbath and follow conscience. Life must be dreary and joyless to Christians.

So the people talk who boast of being free from the restraints of the Bible. But, as a matter of fact, the happiest people in this world are those who are keeping God's commandments. Who ever heard of sin "rejoicing the heart"? Disobedience never made any one happy, but obedience always gives peace.

There are fresh-water springs in the sea that continually pour out sweet water beneath all the brackish tides. So in the obedient heart, under all self-denials, there is a spring of joy ever flowing. It is the peace of God which nothing can disturb, a holy fountain whose flow nothing can ever check.

There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th' everlasting chime —
Who carry music in their heart,
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.

KEBLE.

Many, O Lord my God, are the wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward . . . I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me. — PSALM xl. 5, 17.

DOES God ever think of us, — the great, glorious, eternal God, of us sinful, unworthy beings? We admit that he may think of our earth, for that is something large enough to be worthy of divine thought. He may give thought, too, to some distinguished man, who rises above the masses, as Mont Blanc towers above the common hills of earth. But here am I, a little child, living in a humble street in a great city with its teeming population; surely he never thinks of me. Of course my mother does, because she is my mother, and she has only me; but God has millions more children; it cannot be that he ever gives any particular thought to me, one of the least of these.

The Bible says he does. Think of a parent's thoughts of his child, a father's, a mother's thought. So God loves, watches, thinks, plans, cares, for each one of his children.

Then his thoughts are both loving and wise. He says, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil." There is not a moment when we are not in God's thought. He has plans for each life, taking in its smallest events as well as its greatest. How secure it should make us feel at all times, to know that God is thinking of us, caring for us!

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts. — PSALM li. 6.

NO doubt being is better than doing — that is, if it were possible to separate the two. The worth of a deed depends largely upon who does it. The force of a word depends upon the character and standing of the speaker. We must be good before we can do good.

Yet to be good is not a sufficient aim in life — there must also be the desire to do good. We are never to live for ourselves alone, even in the seeking of good. We are to desire to be blessed that we may be a blessing to others. Everything of good we receive from God should make us able to do more good. It is a new trust from God which we are to hold for him. If our heart be right, then our work, little or much, will have a blessing in it for the world.

Thou must be true thyself
If thou the truth wouldst teach;
Thy soul must overflow, if thou
Another's soul would reach;
It needs the overflow of heart
To give the lips full speech.

Think truly, and thy thoughts
Shall the world's famine feed;
Speak truly, and each word of thine
Shall be a fruitful seed;
Live truly, and thy life shall be
A great and noble creed.

HORATIUS BONAR.

June 17.

Herewith shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. — LEVITICUS xvi. 3.

THE high priest must make an offering for himself before he could present the sacrifice for the people. The lesson is for all who would intercede with God for sinners or engage in any way in the Lord's work. They must strive that their own life may be unspotted and their own sins put away, before they go to God for others.

A frescoer noticed some little blotches on the wall he had painted in delicate tints. Taking a wet cloth he sought to remove the spots; but he only made them worse, for the cloth in his hand was soiled and unclean. So it is when one with spotted hands seeks to remove the faults and blemishes of other lives.

A little child reached out his hand to his mother to receive a present she was about to give him; but his hands were soiled, and his mother said she could not give him what she had for him until they were washed clean. We cannot cleanse the lives of others, nor minister in their behalf, nor can we receive gifts and blessings from God for ourselves or others, if our own hands be foul. We must seek forgiveness first for ourselves.

"Lord, I my vows to thee renew:
Scatter my sins like morning dew;
Guard my first springs of thought and will,
And with thyself my spirit fill."

June 18.

Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come. — ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

IT is easier to begin a Christian life in youth than at any other time. It is easy to train the heart's affections about the cross before they have learned to cling to earth's sordid things. It is easy to teach young fingers to play on the piano or organ, but it is next to impossible to train the stiff fingers of age to do it. So it is easy for the young to learn to strike the harps of heaven. It is easier to keep the heart pure and tender, than to get back its purity and tenderness when once they have been lost.

To-morrow is not ours to hold,
 May never come to bless
Or blight our lives with weal or ill,
 With gladness or distress;
No man shall clasp to-morrow's hand
 Nor catch her on the way;
For when we reach to-morrow's land,
 She'll be, by then, to-day.

You ask me for the golden time—
 I bid you seize this hour,
And fill it full of earnest work,
 While yet you have the power.
To-day the golden time for joy
 Beneath the household eaves;
To-day the royal time for work,
 For bringing in the sheaves.

MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

June 19.

Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. — ACTS xiv. 22.

THE best things of life come out of wounding. Wheat is crushed before it becomes bread. Incense must be cast upon the fire before its odors are set free. The ground must be broken with the sharp plough before it is ready to receive the seed. It is the broken heart that pleases God. The sweetest joys in life are the fruits of sorrow. Human nature seems to need suffering to fit it for being a blessing to the world.

They tell me I must bruise
The rose's leaf,
Ere I can keep and use
Its fragrance brief.

They tell me I must break
The skylark's heart,
Ere her cage song will make
The silence start.

They tell me love must bleed,
And friendship weep,
Ere in my deepest need
I touch that deep.

Must it be always so
With precious things?
Must they be bruised and go
With beaten wings?

Ah, yes! By crushing days,
By caging nights, by scar
Of thorn and stony ways,
These blessings are!

SAMUEL W. DUFFIELD.

He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.—1 JOHN ii. 17.

GOD'S will is always the best; it is always divine love. A stricken wife, standing beside the coffin of her husband, said to a friend: "There lies my husband, my only earthly support, my most faithful human friend, one who has never once failed me; but I must not forget that there lies also the will of God, and that that will is perfect love." By faith she saw good and the blessing in what appeared to her the wreck of all her happiness. But truly the good and the blessing are in every dark providence which comes into the life of God's child. Our Father never means us harm in anything he does or permits. His word is, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you . . . thoughts of peace."

I worship thee, sweet Will of God!
And all thy ways adore;
And every day I live, I seem
To love thee more and more.

I have no cares, O blessed Will!
For all my cares are thine;
I live in triumph, Lord! for thou
Hast made thy triumphs mine.

He always wins who sides with God;
To him no chance is lost;
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

Ill that he blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be his sweet will.

F. W. FABER.

Ye know this, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. — JAMES i. 19.

WE miss a great deal by not being good listeners. The world is full of sweet music, — bird songs, the chirping of insects, the sweet murmur of all nature, the breathing of the wind through the trees, the plashing of the waters; and yet some people never hear one melodious sound as they go through the fields and forests. God is ever speaking in our ears, — in conscience, in his word, in the gentle voice of his Spirit; but many of us miss all this wonderful divine speech. We ought to train ourselves to listen, to hear, to be "swift to hear." We learn by hearing. Truth comes to us from all sides. There is nothing so mean, so lowly, that it may not have some message for us. Wordsworth says: —

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Unless we go about ever listening we may miss many a rich lesson, turning away unaware many an angel who comes from God with a message for us.

> Silence is vocal if we listen well;
> And life and being sing in dulled ears
> From morn to night, from night to morn again,
> With fine articulations; but when God
> Disturbs the soul with terror, or inspires
> With a great joy, the words of doubt and faith
> Sound quick and sharp like drops on forest leaves,
> And we look up to where the pleasant sky
> Kisses the thunder-caps and drinks the song.
>
> J. G. HOLLAND.

For you therefore which believe is the preciousness. — 1 PETER ii. 7.

THE close friends of Christ have found no other influence in their life so strong as his precious friendship in forming and transforming their lives. Continually before them in all its purity and spotlessness, in all its strength and heroism, in all its gentleness and beauty, that fair life has shone, a pattern in the mount, let down from heaven, brought close to them, and winning them by its loveliness. The vision has hung before them continually, and has lifted them up. No one who has had Christ for a friend, in any true, real, vital sense, has failed to be blessed by him in the way of growth into nobler, richer life.

Gentle, sympathetic, strong human friendships can do much for us. You can tell me how in your life, in some time of grief, certain friends came to you, and how by their sweet sympathy, their quiet peace, their strong comfort, they helped you through some valley of shadows. But tell me, rather, what Christ did for you in your hours of sorrow. When the shadows hung over your home, when your heart was bowed in grief, when a life dearer to you than your own hung trembling in the balance, when at last death came and your heart was broken, what was Christ to you then? Was he not precious to you in those dark experiences? We find the best things of Christ's grace and love only in life's experiences of trial.

June 23.

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings. — PROVERBS xxii. 29.

MEN like to rise in the world; but there are different kinds of elevation. One is that which money gives. Then, there is elevation which comes through social recognition. But true elevation is of character and worth. It can be obtained only by being diligent. We are not to wait idly for promotion, but are to be busy at our lowlier duty till the larger is ready for us. Because Moses could not be an emancipator at once, he did not spend his time in idleness, but was faithful as a shepherd; and when God wanted him, he found him at his work. Jesus found Peter, James, and John fishing. The way to make sure of being wanted for a greater work is to do well your plainer work. Diligence makes men ready to go up higher. Do well to-day's work, however lowly; perhaps to-morrow God will have something larger for you. Longfellow has written: —

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Standing on what too long we bore,
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern — unseen before —
A path to higher destinies:

Nor deem the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If, rising on its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain.

Howbeit the Levites hastened it not. — 2 CHRONICLES xxiv. 5.

THE Levites seem to have been indifferent and negligent. No reason is given for their want of energy, but we see its consequence. The house of the Lord remained year after year in its condition of decay, a standing dishonor to the name of God, and a reproach to those who had been commanded to repair it.

This is quite an old story; but we may take for ourselves a lesson on the sin of indolence in doing God's work. Whatever we are bidden to do we should do at once. Promptness is half of obedience. Procrastination is a sad sin. It takes out of life much of its power for good. It grows into a fearful habit if it is encouraged. A boy who is slow and loitering will always be behind time, and when he becomes a man will accomplish but little. Many men, even good men, fail to do all that they might do with their life if only they were always prompt. They lose time, not by being idle, but by loitering, by failing to work intensely.

"Lose this day loitering, 'twill be the same story
To-morrow, and the next more dilatory;
The indecision brings its own delays,
And days are lost lamenting o'er lost days.
Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute.
What you can do, or think you can, begin it;
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated;
Begin it, and the work will be completed."

June 25.

And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron. — EXODUS xxiv. 1.

GOD is always far above us. We can get nearer to him only by rising out of sin and earthliness, into holier, purer life. It was not easy to climb up the steep side of Sinai; it is not easy to rise nearer to God. It costs pain and struggle. We must make stepping-stones of our dead selves, if we would ascend in life and character. We must climb upward step by step.

Jacob saw life visioned before him as a ladder. That is the true vision in every case, — not a level path, through grassy meadows, but rocky steps up a mountain-side. We sing: —

> "Nearer, my God! to thee,
> Nearer to thee!
> E'en though it be a cross
> That raiseth me!"

A child lay dying, and said plaintively, "Lift me higher! Lift me higher!" The father took the little one in his arms, and lifted her up high as he could raise her, as she continued to plead, with failing strength, "Lift me higher!" Soon she was gone, lifted out of her earthly father's trembling arms, into the bosom of her heavenly Father. On the child's grave they cut her name and the words: "Lifted higher!" God wants us all to come up to him, to get closer to him, to be lifted higher into life's better things.

June 26.

As he thinketh in his heart so is he. — PROVERBS xxiii. 7.

OUR thoughts make us. They are the silent builders on the temple of character we are rearing. They give color and form to the whole building. If we think truly, we are rearing up a fabric whiter than Parian marble. If our thoughts are evil, the fabric that is rising within us is blemished.

The inner and the outer life will always correspond in the end. A bad heart will work through to the surface. If a man's life is righteous, you know his thoughts are just; unjust thoughts will never yield righteousness in conduct.

Thoughts seem mere nothings, flecks of cloud flying through the air, flocks of birds flitting by, and gone. But they are the most real things about our life. All things we do are thoughts first. Our thoughts fly out like birds, and take their place in the world. Then our heart is still their home-nest, whither they will return at last to dwell. Ella Wheeler Wilcox says: —

> I hold it true that thoughts are things,
> Endowed with bodies, breath, and wings,
> And that we send them forth to fill
> The world with good results — or ill.
>
> Then let your secret thoughts be fair;
> They have a vital part and share
> In shaping worlds and moulding fate —
> God's system is so intricate.

A good man shall obtain favor of the Lord.—PROVERBS xii. 2.

IT is certainly worth while to have the Lord's favor. If we know that he is smiling upon us, we need not much mind what the world thinks. Christ's commendation sweetens even the bitterest of unjust blame. It was very comforting for Mary when the disciples were finding fault, to have Jesus say, "She hath wrought a good work." This approval healed the hurt the disciples' unfit words had caused.

A good man obtains God's favor. A good man is one who loves God and does his will. The Scripture does not say a great man, a rich man, a strong man, a man of rank. If either of these were the qualification required there would be very many people who never could obtain the divine favor; for not many of us are either great, rich, strong, or noble. The qualification is a "good" man. Goodness is within the reach of all of us. If only we are good, it matters little what our condition in other regards may be.

The other side of this proverb is also instructive: "A man of wicked devices will he condemn." Again, it is not poverty, nor ignorance, nor commonplace condition, that misses the Lord's favor, but a bad heart, one full of intrigue, scheming, and evil designs against others. If we would have God's favor we must keep a guileless heart.

He went out to his father, . . . he said, . . . My head! my head! . . . he . . . brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. — 2 KINGS iv. 18, 19, 20.

THE child went out with glee from the home door into the harvest-field, where his father and the reapers were busy. The sun was hot, and it was not long till the little one was crying in great pain. The father was too busy to give much thought to his sick child. The mother was the person to do that, and he sent the boy home by a servant. The mother was not too busy to attend to her child — mothers never are. With maternal tenderness she took her stricken boy on her knees, doing all in her power to restore him. But when noon came he was dead in her arms.

What a change a few hours made in that home! We are never sure when we leave the breakfast-table and scatter to our several tasks, that our merry laughter shall not be turned to grief before nightfall. This consciousness should make our home intercourse very affectionate, since any hour we spend together may be the last. The scene in this old Shunem home is one which has been repeated in so many households, that, as we linger on it, it touches all hearts, and makes this Jewish mother kin to thousands of other mothers. No matter that she lived twenty-seven hundred years ago. To us she is a mother with her dead child in her arms, and our hearts are touched by her grief down through all these centuries.

There is no God like thee . . . who keepest covenant . . . with thy servants, that walk before thee with all their heart. — 1 KINGS viii. 23.

PRAYER is not all request and supplication. We ought not to speak to God merely and only when we want some favor from his hand. Much of all true prayer is adoration and praise. A loving child-heart always seeks to express its love and confidence.

"There is no God like thee." The heathen have their idols, but our God is not like them. They see not, hear not, love not, care not for those who worship them. Our God loves and keeps covenant. What he promises he performs. His word never fails, is never broken. What a strong confidence it gives us to be sure that the God in whom we trust always keeps his word! Not a promise of his ever has been broken.

There is something else here which we must not overlook. We should never cut Bible sentences in two in the middle, for if we do we shall get only half truths. God keeps covenant; but to every covenant there are two sides, and we have something to do to secure what he has promised. He keeps covenant with those who "walk before him with all their heart." That is our part, and it should be our continual care to be faithful to God in all our ways. There is no danger that he will fail us; let us take heed that we do not fail in our part.

June 30.

My mouth shall utter truth . . . All the words of my mouth are in righteousness. — PROVERBS viii. 7, 8.

IN this world's counsels there is a great deal of guessing and speculating. Friends advise us, and intend to speak only what is true; yet by reason of the limitation of their knowledge, they may often give wrong counsel. Bad advice, though well meant and honestly given, has wrecked many a life. But here is counsel that is always absolutely true. The words that this divine Wisdom speaks to us are always infallibly right words. Here is a guide in whose leading we may put implicit confidence. Here is a counsellor whose counsel is always safe, because always right and true.

Those who abandon themselves utterly to the word of God, follow its counsels, and obey its every precept, are sure of blessedness in two worlds. It never has been heard that the Bible took any person on a course which ended in disaster, or in any loss or dishonor. It always leads in right paths; and these right paths are safe throughout, and have their unvarying destination in the highest good and blessedness of those who pass over them.

"Lord, I had chosen another lot,
But then I had not chosen well;
Thy choice and only thine was good;
No different lot, search heaven or hell,
Had blessed me, fully understood,
None other which thou orderest not."

And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. — JOEL ii. 25.

IT is God who says, "I will restore." Only the divine hand can do it. Christ is the restorer, for he has made atonement for us. There is an old legend which says that Jesus was crucified with his face turned away from the Holy City and looking toward the west. One writes, referring to this legend: —

"His face was westward. Knew the soldiers why
Thus in its stony cleft they turned the beam?
Perchance they learn that Jewish elders deem
Unholy glances from the filming eye
Of man condemned upon a cross to die,
Might shed pollution Zion's courts around,
Which God of old so beautiful had found;
So, leaning westward hangs he, death anigh.
Murmurs the heedless city. O'er him breaking,
Beyond the far hills and the soundless main,
Rise lands and peoples, deep in night's domain,
Where deathless love shall conquer; nations waking
Down the long ages, prisoned souls set free.
His face was westward — it was turned to me."

This is very beautiful. Wherever there is a life that is hurt by sin or sorrow in all the land, the face of the Christ on the cross beams on it with healing in its beams. "By his stripes we are healed." By his wounding our wounds are cured. His visage was marred, that the marring of sin in our faces might be changed to beauty. By his sorrows our sorrows are comforted. "I will restore the cankered years," he said.

He smote thrice, and stayed . . . Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times. — 2 KINGS xiii. 18, 19.

CHARACTER comes out in little things. It seemed a small matter, there in the prophet's dying chamber, whether the king shot three arrows or six, yet the future successes of his sword depended on it. Unconsciously, he was undergoing a critical test. His lack of energy in shooting the arrows betrayed a fatal weakness of character. And when the test was over the measure of his success in life was unalterably fixed. No doubt he would have given large sums for a repetition of the testing, now that he knew what depended on it; but it was too late.

Every life is full of just such testings. Destinies are forever turning on events too trivial for record. Our characters are ever being put to proof in the smallest things, and the result settles important matters for our future. He who improves his one talent receives more. He who is faithful in things that are least is intrusted with greater things. On the other hand, unfaithfulness in the smallest things is forever keeping men out of greater trusts. The picking up of a pin in a merchant's office has made a great destiny for a boy. There is not a lad who may not make or unmake his fortune any day by some unconscious act.

God also is continually putting us to the test to see how we do this or that little thing; and he determines thereby whether or not he can intrust great things to us.

July 3.

He hath put a new song in my mouth. — PSALM xl. 3.

THE ancient statue of Memnon was supposed to become musical when the sun rose and the beams of morning light fell upon it. When the light of the gospel falls upon a darkened heart, it begins to sing. No wonder salvation gives joy. Only think of what we are saved from — the horrible pit of sin — and of what we are saved to — childship in God's family. Can we but rejoice, if we realize our full deliverance?

Every Christian should be a singer. If we cannot acquire the vocal art, we should at least sing and make melody in our heart unto the Lord. God wants to put a song into the mouth of every child of his. Our song should be one that nothing can check. Paul sang in prison with his feet fast in the stocks, and his back gashed with stripes. No trouble or pain should have power to hush the song in a Christian's heart.

Then, our lives themselves should be songs. We cannot all be poets, to write glad hymns of praise for others to sing; or singers, to thrill hearts by the sweetness of our voice; but we can live hymns and songs, and that is just as pleasing to God.

The heart that trusts forever sings,
And feels as light as it had wings;
Come good or ill, —
Whate'er to-day, to-morrow brings, —
It is his will.

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

July 4.

The children of Israel . . . kept the feast. . . with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful. — EZRA vi. 21, 22.

THE Lord is always doing things to make us joyful, if only we will accept the love he sends us in them and rejoice. Christian life ought to be one of joy. Christ said he wished his disciples to have his joy in them, and wished their joy to be full. There are a great many reasons why we should be joyous Christians. The greatest is that we are saved from sin and are in God's family. Our privileges, blessings, and hopes are enough to fill our hearts with gladness.

We ought to show our joy in gratitude. Some people take all God gives them, accept all he does for them, and yet go through life grumbling and complaining all the time. Every little trial or care counts for more with them than all the multitude of God's goodnesses. There is never any sunshine in their faces, for they can always find something that is not satisfactory, to make a cloud of, and to give them excuse for being unhappy. This is a poor, miserable way to live. These people are neither joyful themselves, nor do they help to make the world brighter. We ought to be ashamed to live so unworthily and unbeautifully. God wants us to be burning and shining lights, and to scatter happiness and good cheer wherever we go. Instead of being croakers, he wants us to be sweet singers. It is a sin not to live cheerfully.

Blessed be the Lord . . . there hath not failed one word of all his good promise. — 1 KINGS viii. 56.

IT is nearly three thousand years since Solomon uttered this testimony; but we can say now, just as confidently as the king did that day, that in all these centuries since not one word of all God's good promise has failed any one of his people. No one has ever trusted a word of God, and had that word fail of fulfilment.

The most real and sure things in this world are the words of God. In every one of them God's own almighty hand is gloved; we clutch them, and find ourselves clutched in turn by divinity, out of whose clasp we never can fall, nor be torn away. We lean upon these words, and find ourselves encircled and upborne by the everlasting arms. We pillow our head in weariness or sorrow upon God's words of love and comfort, and find ourselves drawn close to our Father's heart, held in his warm bosom, and soothed by his tenderness, which is gentler than a mother's.

So all through life, in every experience, we may trust the promises of God, and commit all our interests to them, and be assured in our heart that not one of them will ever fail us. We may trust them, too, in death, and we shall find everything just as God has said — the divine presence with us in the valley, dying but a going to be at home, absent from the body at home with the Lord, in eternal blessedness. Not one word of God can fail.

July 6.

This thing became a sin. — 1 KINGS xii. 30.

THE king's plan was successful. The people did not go back to the temple at Jerusalem, but bowed down before the calves. The separation was thus made complete. No only so, but the false leading of the king turned the ten tribes into a path that took them farther and farther away from God. The name of Jeroboam is held up to execration through all the after history as the man who made Israel to sin. It was certainly an unenviable immortality that Jeroboam achieved — a man who made others sin.

Sin grows from small beginnings till it attains giant proportions. The man who starts an error knows not what moral ruin will come from it. To teach one child falsely may be to blight thousands of lives. Those who begin new enterprises set in motion streams of influence, good or bad, which may continue to flow forever. Jeroboam gave character to this new kingdom, and all the nineteen kings who followed him walked in his steps.

There is a story of an abbot who coveted a piece of ground. The owner consented to lease it to the abbot for one crop only. The abbot sowed acorns, a crop which took three hundred years to ripen. Jeroboam's one sowing mortgaged the new kingdom for evil through all its history. Satan begs for one crop only, and then sows seeds whose harvest will fill all the life to the end. We do not know what we are doing when we start a wrong thing.

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life. — ST. JOHN iv. 14.

IF you are a true believer in Christ, your new life will become a spring of water in you. Wherever you go, into the driest desert, into the hottest plain, far away from the means of grace and from spiritual privileges, into the dark paths of sorrow, your life shall not waste nor fail, for its fountain is within you. It is not fed from without, nor is it dependent upon ordinances and means of grace as sources of nourishment along the way. The fountain of your life, your comfort, your joy, your strength, is fed from the mountains of heaven, from the fulness of Christ; hence it can never waste. Thus from this well of water in the heart of the Christian flows out a perpetual stream of life, with blessing for the world.

If you can be only a little spring, with but water enough to fill a pilgrim's cup, do not be discouraged; be the sweet blessing that you can be, and thank God for the privilege. Yet Jesus says that "rivers of living water" shall flow from this well in him who believes — not a mere trickling rill, but large rivers, to bless a whole community. We should not be satisfied with any small measure of usefulness. We should seek to bear much fruit. We should always abound in the work of the Lord. We should seek to be the largest blessing we can be.

July 8.

Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God. — ST. MARK iv. 11.

IT is wonderful how differently the truth of Christ looks from within and from without. It is like the great picture windows in a church. One who stands outside and looks at them sees none of their rich beauty. They seem dull, opaque, and without meaning. But let one stand within the building and look at the rich windows, and all is transformed. The lines and figures appear in all their rich loveliness.

It is the same with the truths of God's word. They are not attractive to those who are without. People sometimes sneer at the faith of Christians, as they find them leaning upon an unseen God, and clinging to intangible hopes. But when one becomes a Christian all is changed. Where there was no loveliness, there now appears the loftiest beauty. What was laughed at before is now seen to be worthy of highest admiration. Only those who have accepted Christ can really understand the wonderful things of his love.

O God within, so close to me
That every thought is plain,
Be Judge, be Friend, be Father, still,
And in thy heaven reign!
Thy heaven is mine — my very soul!
Thy words are sweet and strong:
They fill my inward silences
With music and with song.

WILLIAM C. GANNETT.

The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. — PSALM CXLV. 14.

GOD never gets tired helping us learn our lessons. No matter how often we miss, he is ready to give us another chance. When we fail to have our lesson learned, he does not give us up, putting us out of his school, but tells us to take the lesson over again and try to get it better. Only think how often we have to try before we do things as he wants us to do them, how often we fall in trying to walk before we learn to walk. If our great Teacher were not patient with us we should never become like Christ; but he never wearies of our slowness. He is pleased with our efforts, however faulty they are, and has for us always an encouraging word.

"He came to my desk with a quivering lip —
The lesson was done.
'Dear teacher, I want a new leaf,' he said:
'I have spoiled this one.'
In place of the leaf so stained and blotted
I gave him a new one all unspotted,
And into his sad eyes smiled —
'Do better, now, my child.'

"I went to the throne with a quivering soul —
The old year was done —
'Dear Father, hast thou a new leaf for me?
I have spoiled this one.'
He took the old leaf, stained and blotted,
And gave me a new one all unspotted,
And into my sad heart smiled —
'Do better now, my child.'"

July 10.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. — ST. JOHN xiii. 35.

IN all the cordage of the British naval service, there is a red thread twisted, which cannot be taken out without undoing the whole. So there is one unfailing mark of Christian character, wherever it is found. Love is always in it. Whatever else may be or may not be in the new life of the Christian, the scarlet thread of love is always woven into the character. God is love, and the believer in Christ is like God. To be a Christian is to have Christ in the heart; and Christ is love. Not to have love is not to be a Christian.

The first effect of faith in Christ is the springing up of love in the heart of him who believes. This love does not lie hidden, but is revealed in the life. It shows itself in love for God; but there is no love for God which does not also make the heart warm toward man. He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, cannot love God, whom he hath not seen. And this love is not a mere beautiful sentiment, glowing like a radiant vision in the soul, but fading the moment we meet our brothers in actual life; it is a love that becomes the very mainspring of all action, the burning heart of all ambition. It is a love that makes us pitiful toward all human sorrow, gentle toward human infirmity, helpful toward human need, patient under human unkindness and injury, and ready at every call to do and suffer and sacrifice.

July 11.

Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. — ROMANS XV. 1.

THERE are some people who are anointed to be helpers of others. Those who have questions or perplexities, those who are seeking light or guidance, turn to them instinctively, with confidence, sure of finding what they seek.

There is need for such helpers. There are questions which books or sermons do not answer — it is a friend that is needed, one who can understand and sympathize. No other ministry to which men are ordained in this world is so sacred as this, which comes into lives in their deepest experiences, at times when, without wise help, they may be wrecked. There is no one of us who may not be such a helper.

If there be some weaker one,
Give me strength to help him on:
If a blinder soul there be,
Let me guide him nearer thee.
Make my mortal dreams come true
With the work I fain would do;
Clothe with life my weak intent,
Let me be the thing I meant:
Let me find in thy employ
Peace, that dearer is than joy;
Out of self to love be led
And to heaven acclimated,
Until all things sweet and good
Seem my natural habitude.

J. G. WHITTIER.

July 12.

We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen. — ST. JOHN iii. 11.

THE things that Christ teaches are certainties. Very much human science is only guessing; we cannot be sure of it. Every now and then some new discovery is made which sweeps away whole volumes of boasted theories. We have to be all the time buying new books to keep up with the times; and we are afraid to quote from any but the newest editions, lest there has been some recent discovery which contradicts the older.

But Christ's teachings are certainties. He came down from heaven, where from all eternity he had dwelt, and he knew the things he taught. We may accept his words without the slightest doubt, and may build our soul's hopes upon them. What he said about God, about God's love, about heaven, about the judgment, about the future life, about the way of salvation, is all certainty. As we go on into the future, we shall find everything just as he has described it.

This fact should give us deep and strong confidence if we are reposing upon Christ's promises for salvation and life. It should drive us speedily to his cross for refuge if we are still unsheltered, for he has told us of condemnation abiding upon all who do not believe on him. We may not disregard a single word that Christ spoke, for all his words are all true and eternal. Not one of them can ever fail him who leans upon it.

And Joshua . . . the servant of the Lord, died. — JUDGES ii. 8.

WE have no elaborate account of the closing scenes of this good man's life. Many chapters are filled with accounts of his life, his work, his wise words, and his many activities; but all we know about his death is told in one little phrase. If he had lived in these days the scenes of his death would have been described with glowing pen. We should have known what his last words were, how he met the end, whether with or without fear; what dying testimony he left to the power of divine grace. But not a word have we about any of these things. We are told simply, in the briefest possible words, that he died.

The same is true of all Bible saints. We have no death-bed scenes, no descriptions of dying experiences. The meaning of this is that it matters very little how a man dies — living is the important thing. Not many people have raptures in the last hour. Some, whose lives have been very Christly, die without any remarkable manifestation of faith or any joyous experiences. Then sometimes those who have not lived a Christian life at all seem to have the greatest raptures in their last hours. All this proves that it is living, not dying, that tests one's character. In such a man as Joshua it mattered not whether he had a triumphant end, or sank away in the shadows of old age, and died without a word of ecstasy. His life was his testimony. He needed no other.

Joshua . . . died . . . and the children of Israel did that which was evil . . . and they forsook the Lord.— JUDGES ii. 8–12.

THAT is too often the way. So long as the godly parent or the faithful friend lives, it is not hard to do right; but when the human guide is gone the restraining hand is withdrawn, and the child or friend drifts away from the holy influence. Many a boy begins to drift at his mother's grave.

There was a man whose besetting sin was strong drink. He said to a friend one day: "When I am with you I feel strong; if I could always be with you I should never give way to my terrible passion." Said his friend: "Whenever you feel the temptation getting the mastery over you, come to me and I will help you." So, many a time this poor man might have been seen hurrying toward his friend's office. Once in that helpful presence, he soon grew strong.

But death came to this friend, and among those who wept at his grave none shed bitterer tears than he who had so often run to him for the sympathy and help that saved him. Soon the temptation came again, and there was no one to whom to go. In his despair he fell into the old sin, and sank down to ruin. If he had known Christ, when his friend died he would still have missed him, and would have found living harder wanting his help, but he would not have sunk down in utter helplessness. He would then have had the strength of Christ to support him in his temptation.

July 15.

Jesus gave him no answer. — St. John xix. 9.

THE silences of Jesus are as significant as his words. He was silent before Pilate. He understood the governor's miserable insincerity. Pilate had had opportunity enough to do the right thing, but he had thrown away his chance. Now Jesus would answer no more of his questions. It was not worth while.

One lesson we get from this silence of Jesus is, that if we reject his offer of grace over and over, the time may come, will come, when he will be silent to us. And of all calamities that can possibly ever come to any man, no other could be so great as that Christ should be silent to his prayers, turning his back and answering no more when he calls.

Another lesson from Christ's example is, that there come times in every life when silence is better than speech. Ofttimes to words of reviling or insult, silence is the only true answer. To many of the assaults made by sceptics on our religion, it is better that we remain silent. There is a time to speak boldly in the presence of Christ's enemies; but there also are times when we should keep silence, attempting no answer.

"Let me no wrong or idle word
Unthinking say;
Set thou a seal upon my lips
Just for to-day."

This ointment might have been sold . . . and given to the poor. And they murmured against her. — ST. MARK xiv. 5.

IT is very easy to yield to the temptation to criticise others, and find fault with their way of serving Christ. There are many motives which come in to encourage this unchristian habit. We are all prone to be envious of others, and hence to form unjust opinions of what they do. One of the last graces to ripen in a Christian is usually that of rejoicing in another's good work. It is very hard, too, to learn our Lord's lesson: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." It seems natural, too, sad as the confession may be, for us to disparage what others do and to underestimate it.

But we should learn the sinfulness of murmuring against others. We see how unlovely, how unchristlike, it was in these first disciples. Is it any less so in us when we allow ourselves to criticise our fellow-Christians, finding fault with the way they show their love for Christ? Even if they do not do their work as we do ours, have we a right to judge them and blame them, and speak unkind things about what they have done? Between them and their Master rests the matter, and it is not our duty to make ourselves judges and condemners of their acts. They are responsible — not we — for what they do. There are few lessons more needed than this, for there are few faults more common than that which we see here in these first disciples.

All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness. — HEBREWS xii. 11.

WE have all known Christian sufferers who have grown into rare, sweet beauty as they have suffered. They have lost their earthliness and have learned heavenliness. Pride has given way to humility. The harsh music has grown soft and gentle. The rough marble has taken the shape of graceful beauty. There are elements of loveliness in the depths of every life which pain alone can bring out. God often takes his children into a darkened room and draws the curtains while he brings out more clearly in them the features of his own image, which before had been only dim and shadowy outlines.

Yet afflictions do not always make people better. Not all suffering yields the fruit of righteousness. We have all seen people suffering who became only more impatient, selfish, and cold. Their trouble hurt them.

As I watch the effects of trial upon men and women, I find that it is only in the fewest cases that the life is made more radiant by pain. There are dangerous shoals skirting all the deeps of affliction, and many frail barks are wrecked in the darkness. In no experience of life do most persons need wise friendship and firm, loving guidance more than in their times of trouble.

As the Lord, the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand. — 1 KINGS xvii. 1.

WE all stand before God. His eye is ever upon us. His face ever beams its light upon us. We all believe this, and say it often with our lips; yet many of us do not really get the truth into our heart. If we did, it would make better people of us. We should not slight our work as now we do so often, if we were truly conscious that God is looking on us as we work.

This consciousness would also give us hope and courage in darkness or danger. Some people think of "Thou God seest me" as a reason for fear and terror. But it was not so to Hagar when she called God by this name. It meant to her divine love and care. God had not forgotten her nor forsaken her. She was cast out of her earthly home, but the Lord saw her and took her up. If we are God's children, the thought of our Father should always bring us comfort, assurance, a wonderful sense of security. So it is a great thing to stand before God, to be conscious of his eye upon us, and to know him so well as not to be afraid of him.

I say to thee, do thou repeat
To the first man thou mayest meet,
In lane, highway, or open street, —

That he and we and all men move
Under a canopy of love,
As broad as the blue sky above.

R. C. TRENCH.

Thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. — 1 KINGS xvii. 4.

GOD is never at a loss for a way of providing for his children. The brooks of water, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the winds of heaven, the waves of the sea — all creatures belong to him, and are under his direct control. He has no trouble, therefore, in getting food to his children wherever they may be. Perhaps none of us ever had ravens carry us our daily bread, but God sends it to us in other ways; and it is just as really he who sends it, whether railroad trains carry it across a continent, or ships bring it half around the globe, or birds bear it to our windows, or it come through hands of loving friends.

We know too much for our good these modern days, — many of us. We are so wise about "laws of nature" that we can account for everything on scientific grounds, and have no need for God's interference anywhere; consequently we forget, some of us, that God has anything to do with this world. What poor fools we are! What are nature's laws but God's established ways of doing things? If I sow wheat-seeds on a little patch of soil, and in a few months reap a harvest, and then, taking the wheat to the mill, get fine flour and have good bread on my table, had God nothing to do with sending it to me? Did not he provide it as really as when he sent the ravens to Elijah day by day, with food for him?

July 20.

It came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up.— 1 KINGS xvii. 7.

THAT is the way this world's brooks always do. For a time they flow full; then they begin to waste, and at last dry up altogether. This is true of all earthly joys. There is a comfort, however, in what comes after the statement made in these words. When the brook dried up, God had another place ready for his servant. "Arise, get thee to Zarephath." There he found other help ready.

It must have been a sore test of Elijah's faith to watch the stream growing less and less every day. "What shall I do when the brook is dry?" he would wonder. But we need not suppose that he ever worried about it. He knew that God was providing for him, and would have something else ready when this supply ceased. One morning there was no water running over the stones, and the prophet had to eat a dry breakfast — only bread and meat; but still, I think he did not grow anxious. Then after breakfast the Lord came and told him to move.

The lesson is, that we are never to doubt God, no matter how low the supply gets. Though we have come down to the last mouthful of bread and the last cupful of water, and still see no new provision beyond, we are to take the last morsel with thankfulness, believing that God will have something else ready in time. It will be soon enough if it is ready when we have eaten the last crust.

July 21.

And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah. — 1 KINGS xvii. 15.

THAT is, she took the handful of flour she had and the little oil, and made a cake for her hungry guest first, and then for herself and her household. Then she found that there was as much meal and oil left as she had before.

There are several things to commend in this woman. One is her faith. She believed what was told her, and acted on it. It is when we do God's commandments that he blesses us. His promises are conditional, depending upon the fulfilment of our part. Had this woman not believed and obeyed, the wonderful two or three years' miracle in her house would not have been wrought. The woman's unselfish generosity must also be commended. She had enough only for a meal for herself and son, but she fed the stranger first. Had she prepared a meal for herself and son, and left the hungry prophet unfed, there would have been no miracle of increase. We must be ready to share our little with others who need, if we would have the blessing on ourselves. Mrs. Charles writes: —

Is thy cruse of comfort failing?
Rise and share it with another,
And through all the years of famine
It shall serve thee and thy brother.
Love divine will fill thy storehouse,
Or thy handful still renew;
Scanty fare for one will often
Make a royal feast for two.

July 22.

She, and he, and her house, did eat many days.— 1 KINGS xvii. 15.

HAD not the prophet come to the widow's door she and her household would probably have perished in the famine. Or had the woman refused the prophet's request, saying, "I cannot spare anything for a stranger; charity begins at home, and I must look first after my own," she and hers would have starved before the rain fell. The meal wasted not because she shared it with another.

The lesson is plain. There is a withholding that tendeth to poverty; there is a giving that enricheth. The way to make sure of spiritual blessing is, to seek to be a blessing. If your love is growing cold, help some one and it will become warm again. We cannot afford to shut our doors in the face of those God sends to us for sympathy and for the ministries of love. Such serving brings to us blessings which we must not miss.

Is thy cruse of comfort failing
Rise and share it with another.

ELIZABETH CHARLES.

Remain not folded in thy pleasant joys
Within the narrow circle of thy walls,
Content if thine are blessed. Cold is thy fire,
If on thy hearth-stone only; and thy bread
Bitter, which feeds alone thy selfish blood;
Thy house a prison, if it hold thy world,
Thy heaven a fiction.

F. R. ABBE.

He . . . came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die.— 1 KINGS xix. 4.

HE was sorely discouraged. It seemed to him that all he had done had come to nothing. There are few things we need more to guard against than discouragement. When once we come under its influence, it makes us weak, robbing us of our hope and making cowards of us. Many a life is discrowned and drawn down to failure through discouragement.

It is surely a sad picture — this greatest of the old prophets lying there under the little bush, in the wilderness, longing to die. If he had died then and there, what an inglorious ending it would have made of his life! As it was, however, he lived to do further glorious work and to see great results from his contest with idolatry. God was kinder to him than he knew.

It is wrong to wish ourselves dead. Life is God's gift to us, a sacred trust for which we shall have to give account. While God keeps us living he has something for us to do. Our prayer should be for grace to do our duty bravely and well unto the end. From Elijah's after-experience we learn that we should never be cast down by any discouraging experiences. The things we think have failed are often only slowly ripening into rich success. We have only to be faithful to God and to duty, and we may always rejoice. What seems failure is often best success.

An angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat . . . He . . . went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights. — 1 KINGS xix. 5, 8.

BEHOLD the loving gentleness of God. He followed his discouraged servant in his flight, kept watch over him all the way, and did not cast him off. There is great comfort in this for us all. God is very patient with us in our weakness and fault. He does not break bruised reeds.

Then it must be noticed that when God would restore his servant's soul he began with his body. He gave him sleep and then food, till his exhausted nature was refreshed. Much spiritual depression is caused by the bodily condition. Ofttimes the best cure for despondency is sleep and rest, until the body is restored to healthy conditions.

This incident is typical. God is continually preparing a table in the wilderness where he feeds his weary ones. In their sorrows, he provides for them meat which the world knows not of; they rise up and go on their journey with joy, sustained by the secret strength which divine grace supplies. Many persons whose lot in life is hard go through the days with cheerful, songful spirit, because every morning in the closet God gives them food which makes them strong. Those whom God thus blesses

"Carry music in their heart,
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart;
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

July 25.

I, even I only, am left. — 1 KINGS xix. 10.

THERE is something very pathetic in this word. Elijah really thought he was alone. He did not know of one other man in all the land who was loyal to God. This made it all the harder for him. Companionship strengthens us. It is comparatively easy in battle for one to march and fight in the ranks, with others all around him; but to move out alone, old soldiers say, is a sore test of courage. It is easy to be good, faithful, and loyal in duty, diligent in Christian service, when one has companionship. But it tests one's life to have to stand alone, the only Christian in the family, the workshop, the store, the school. But many have to stand just in this way. They are really the only one who is in their place to stand for God. If they fail, God's work there will suffer greatly.

But we see also the value of a single life. For years Elijah was the only one who confessed the Lord and was faithful to him. Yet though utterly alone, and not knowing of any others who even secretly were true, he yet stood firm, and bravely maintained the honor of Jehovah in the face of a whole nation. As we read the story through to the end we see the outcome of his faithfulness. He alone wrought a great reformation. We sometimes find ourselves alone — the only one to witness for Christ in the place where we stand. If we simply stand and falter not, we shall by and by see the triumph of that for which we stand.

Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel . . . which have not bowed unto Baal. — 1 KINGS xix. 18.

THINGS were not so bad as Elijah had thought. He supposed he was the only one; but there were seven thousand more, scattered here and there through the land, who were still loyal to God. God's cause in this world is never hopeless. He has others where we think we are the only one.

There is an experience of Luther's which is suggestive: "At one time," he says, "I was sorely vexed and tried by my own sinfulness, by the wickedness of the world, and by the dangers that beset the church. One morning I saw my wife dressed in mourning. Surprised, I asked her who had died. 'Do you not know?' she replied; 'God is dead.' 'How can you talk such nonsense?' I said. 'How can God die?' 'Is that really true?' she asked. 'Of course,' I said, not perceiving her aim. 'How can you doubt it?' 'Yet,' she said, 'though you do not doubt that, yet you are so helpless and discouraged.'"

Workmen of God, oh, lose not heart,
But learn what God is like!
And, in the darkest battle-field,
Thou shalt know where to strike.

Oh, blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field, when He
Is most invisible.

F. W. FABER.

It came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven. — 2 KINGS ii. 1.

WHEN a good man leaves the world he does not cease to live. The Lord took Elijah to live in another country. We are able actually to verify this statement. We have but to turn over to the Gospels to see him again, nearly nine hundred years later, alive, and active still in God's work.

It is just as true of the Christians who die in our homes as it was of this old prophet, that the Lord takes them up into heaven, and that they live on in blessedness forever.

One cold autumn day I saw an empty bird's-nest on a tree. It looked desolate and forsaken. But I knew the birds that once were there were living yet, living now in the warm South, beyond the reach of winter's storms, and singing there their sweet songs. There is an empty love nest in many a home, in many a heart, but we know that the dear one who is gone is living with God in heaven. There is comfort in this.

There is a suggestion in the way God took Elijah from earth. It was "by a whirlwind." A whirlwind suggests terror. But this wild storm was God's chariot, and it took the prophet up into heaven. Death always seems terrible to nature. Sometimes it comes in form of special terror. But however it may come, it takes God's child home to glory.

It came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire . . . which parted them both asunder. — 2 KINGS ii. 11.

SO the most loving friends must sometimes be parted. We walk on together, talking of a thousand things, not dreaming of separation, when suddenly, as we turn some sharp corner in the way, the chariot is waiting, and one is taken and the other left. We ought not to forget the certainty of separation in every friendship we form. Some day one of the two will be taken, and the other must be left to weep by a grave and to walk on lonely and sorrowing after that.

Another thought suggested here is, that heaven is not far away. One of the chariots from the King's country came down that day to carry Elijah home. Another came down to the door of your house when the baby died, or when father or mother or brother or sister died. We shall not leave this world as Elijah did — missing death — we shall have to pass through the valley; but we shall have the heavenly chariot to bear away our freed spirit just as truly as he did.

To die? it is to rise
To fairer, brighter skies,
Where death no more shall his dread harvests reap;
To soar on angel wings
Where life immortal springs,
For so he giveth his beloved sleep.

I. N. TARBOX.

Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. — 2 KINGS ii. 9.

ELISHA'S choice shows where his heart was. He did not ask for position, for wealth, for ease, for honor, but for more life, more spiritual power. He had watched his master in his great work, his zeal for God, his heroism, his intense earnestness, and he wanted to have a large measure of the same spirit. He wanted most of all to be a better man, a more useful man, more active and mighty in the Lord's work. Here is a good lesson for us. We ought to seek above all other things the qualities and graces and beauties which make a noble character.

There is something else. Elisha greatly admired his master, Elijah, and his chief desire was to be like him. This is commendable. Christ, our Master, is the one great and perfect example, and all of us should imitate him. Any other model is too low. Yet he gives us in his true followers pictures of at least some fragments of his own beauty, and it is right for us to imitate these. St. Paul said: "Be ye imitators of me." Every parent should live so that his child, imitating him, shall be ever following Christ and growing more like him. Tennyson said: "I am a part of all that I have met." It is right when we see anything beautiful in another to desire to have the same beauty in ourselves. Whether we will or not, we grow, even unconsciously, like those whom we admire and love.

He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him. — 2 KINGS ii. 13.

WE are continually seeing useful lives removed from earth. The loss seems irreparable. But there are no accidents in God's providence. Every one's life is a plan of God, and no faithful servant is taken away until his part in the great plan is finished. There is abundance of work remaining, but it is the work of others, not of him who is gone. His mantle falls at some one's feet — yours, perhaps.

A good father dies, and there is grief in the home. How he will be missed! Yes; but an elder son stands by the coffin, strong and gifted, blessed with the blessing of the father's life and teaching. At his feet the mantle falls from the father's shoulders. He must take it up, and with it lift the burdens and responsibilities of manhood. He must become now his mother's protector, and the shelter and defender of his younger brothers and sisters.

A mother dies, and when a gentle mother goes out of a home the loss indeed seems irreparable. But if there is an elder daughter in the sorrowing group at the grave, at her feet the mantle falls. So it is in all the breaches which death makes in Christian homes and communities, — in every case the mantle falls at some one's feet. God makes provision that his work shall not suffer unless his servants fail in their duty. We must be ready always to take up what is ours.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. — PSALM i. 2.

A perfumer bought a common earthen jar and filled it with attar of roses. Soon every particle of the substance of the jar was filled with the rich perfume; and long afterward, and even when broken, the fragments retained the fragrance. So it is that a human life becomes filled, saturated, with the word of God, when one loves it and meditates upon it continually. The thoughts, feelings, affections, dispositions, and the whole character become colored with the spirit of the word.

Such a filling of the heart and memory with the pure words of God is the best way to prepare for any future of darkness into which the life may pass. It is like hanging up a hundred lamps while the light of day yet shines, to be ready to pour down their soft beams the moment daylight fades.

And when thy darkened eyes no more behold
The glory of the light,
Then shall a purer radiance thee enfold
To bless thy failing sight.
And when to thy dulled ear earth's voices wane,
And singing birds grow dumb,
Then angel harmonies with sweet refrain
Shall to thy spirit come.
For the veiled past shall show a smiling face,
And blessing shall not cease;
To all who work the works of truth and grace
Life's memories shall bring peace!

ANNIE E. LYDDON.

The Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel . . . The Lord hath sent me to Jericho . . . The Lord hath sent me to Jordan. — 2 KINGS ii. 2, 4, 6.

GOD leads us on step by step, each step a new revelation. He led Elijah on with new calls to new errands, from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, from Jericho to Jordan, and then over the river and up among the hills, until at last, as he went on, the chariot came down and lifted him away. In this same beautiful way does God lead each one of his children through life. We know not what any day may bring forth. But he knows; and he calls us forward, to this duty and experience to-day, to others to-morrow, and so on and on, and on and on, until we come to the last step, and that will be into glory.

Elijah's prompt obedience teaches us our side of the lesson. He went swiftly from task to task. He would finish his work before the end came. It was to visit the schools of the prophets that he went to Bethel and to Jericho. He wanted to give his last counsels to the young students whom he had been training and on whom the future religious work among the people would depend.

The nearing of the end of life should intensify our earnestness. A good woman was told that she could not live more than six weeks. "Then I must arise, and hasten to finish my work." Leaving her bed, she went out and hurried from place to place, laboring intensely until the very end came.

August 2.

They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh. — 1 SAMUEL xxxi. 13.

IT has been said that every one lives for a funeral; that the burial one has tells the story of one's life. One man amasses great wealth, and when his body lies in state the rich come and look at him and pass on with their tearless eyes. Another devotes his life to doing good. His hands scatter blessings. The needy are cared for, the hungry are fed, the sick are visited, the fallen are lifted up. When he lies in his coffin, the poor come, the widow and the orphan, those whom his hands have relieved and helped, and with grateful hearts and tearful eyes take their farewell.

It is a beautiful sight — this rescuing of the body of King Saul from dishonor on the field where he had fallen, and it is especially so when we learn that it was an act of kindness which he had done many years before which secured for his dead body the gentle thought and care it received that day. Had Saul's life been filled to its close with such deeds of true valor as marked its beginning he would have had the gratitude of a whole nation when he came to die. We should try to live so that we shall be remembered with gratitude. Then we should never fail to show gratitude to any one who has conferred a favor upon us. Let us be sure, too, that we live so as to obtain honor from God when we come to the end of life. If we miss that, earth's honor will be an awful mockery.

August 3.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. — PSALM xxxii. 3.

SOMETIMES we would better be silent to God. When sore trials are upon us we should not say a word in resistance. But there is a silence to God which does not bring blessing. Sins unconfessed produce bitterness. David's words tell a sad story of the suffering of the days when he kept silent about his guilt.

> "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old
> Through my roaring all the day long.
> For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me."

He could not put away the memory of his sin. It stayed in his mind, saddened every joy and embittered every sweet thing in his life. His very body suffered, and his heart cried out continually in anguish.

Sins unconfessed are a burden too great for mortal to bear. We should never keep silence for a moment about a sin which we have committed. The only true thing to do is to confess it instantly, and put it out of our life utterly and forever. Sin is a demon from the dark abodes, and must be expelled or it will take up its home in the heart and destroy the life. Sin is poison of eternal death, and if not cast out it will spread its death through the soul. The only safety is, by confession and repentance to thrust out remorselessly every sin that has betrayed us.

August 4.

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city. — JEREMIAH XXXIX. 2.

WHEN even the smallest breach is made in a wall, it is the beginning of the end. The breach is easily increased, until, where at first only one or two men could enter, a whole army pours through.

Each of us lives within walls. There is the wall of innocence, which God sets around every human soul. So long as it remains unbroken we are safe; but when once a breach is made, enemies pour in. It is then easy to break down the whole wall, leaving the life exposed to every temptation. Every wild beast enters the garden at pleasure.

Conscience is another of the walls which God builds around each soul. So long as it is kept inviolable it is an impregnable protection. But this, too, may be broken; and when one small breach has been made in it, it is easy to make it larger. It is not so hard to violate conscience the second as the first time. It is easier still the third and the fourth time. By and by the whole wall is broken down. When this time comes the citadel of the heart is utterly in the enemy's hands. Everything beautiful is destroyed. The temple is in ruins, the altar is torn away, the fires are dead, the lamps are out, and there is only darkness in the place once sacred and bright with God's presence. It is well that we look after the walls of our life.

August 5.

In the fourth watch of the night he came unto them. — ST. MATTHEW xiv. 25.

HE did not come immediately; indeed, it was almost morning when he came, and the disciples had been all night struggling in the storm. Yet he had not been indifferent to them meanwhile. From the mountain top where he was praying he kept his eye upon them. "He saw them distressed in rowing." All that dark night he kept a watch upon that little boat in the midst of the waves that bore his disciples.

There is something very suggestive in the picture. This boat in the storm represents Christ's friends in this world in the storms of life. Sometimes we think we are forgotten, but from his place in glory Christ's eye is always on us. He sees us toiling, battling with the waves, beaten, and distressed. He has full sympathy with us in all our struggles. It ought to be a great strength and comfort to us in trial to know this. Jesus intercedes for us in our distresses. It may not be best always to deliver us immediately, but continually ascends his prayer, that our faith may not fail in the struggle. This also should encourage us. Then he always comes in time. He may delay long, but it is never too long. If we call upon him in trouble we may be sure that he hears and sees us, and knows just how hard it is for us to endure; that he prays for us that we may not fail, and that he will come at the right time for our deliverance.

His disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. — ST. MATTHEW XV. 23.

JESUS is not so tender-hearted that he cannot see us suffer when suffering is the best experience for us. He does not immediately lift burdens from our shoulders when it is needful for our growth that we bear the burdens longer. There is a mawkish sentimentality about too many people's ideas of Christ, as if he were too gentle to endure the sight of suffering. It is possible to be too tender toward pain. It is possible for parents to be too emotionally kind to their children. Uncontrolled pity is positive weakness, and it is ofttimes very injurious.

Christ's tenderness is never too tender to be wise as well as tender. He never makes the mistake of yielding to any one's entreaties when denial would be better than acquiescence. He never lets us have what we want because he cannot bear to say "no" to our tearful cries. He is not so tender-hearted as to allow his own disciples to go unchastened when only by chastisement can he promote their growth.

But one thing we must not forget, — it is love that prompts his severity. He was silent here, that, in the end, he might give the full, rich blessing he wanted to give this woman, but which she could not receive at the first. He denies us, and is silent to us when we cry, that he may draw out our faith, and give us his best blessings by and by.

Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. — COLOSSIANS iii. 22.

ST. PAUL speaks of "eyeservice" as a kind of service that is not the truest. There always are those who work well when they are under the eye of a master, but who fall off in diligence and faithfulness when the watching eye is wanting. This is very imperfect serving. The person who takes advantage of an employer and does his work slowly, or loiters at his tasks, or shortens the time he is expected to be at his post, or in any way is less faithful or less diligent and careful than if his employer were beside him, is yielding to a temptation which will hurt his own life immeasurably. The wrong he does to another by skimping his work is sin enough; but the injury done to himself is far more serious. The former is only in money; the latter is in character. The man who does a dishonest thing, or is in any way unfaithful in duty, has lowered the tone of his own life, and blighted irreparably some portion of the possibilities of his being.

Perish policy and cunning!
Perish all that fears the light!
Whether losing, whether winning,
"Trust in God, and do the right."

Simple rule, and safest guiding,
Inward peace, and inward might,
Star upon our path abiding,
"Trust in God, and do the right."

NORMAN MACLEOD.

Hezekiah received the letter . . . and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. — ISAIAH xxxvii. 14.

THAT was Hezekiah's way of laying his troubles in the Lord's hands. He could not do anything, and so he gave the matter to God. We all have our cares. Sometimes it is a business perplexity, sometimes it is a temptation; or it may be a combination of circumstances that seems about to crush us.

What is our duty? what is our privilege? We may take the matter directly to God. We may cast the burden upon him. That is what St. Paul tells us to do with all our anxieties; and he says the peace of God shall then guard our heart and thoughts in Christ Jesus.

Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?
To do the will of Jesus — this is rest.

Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging 'round?
On Jesus' bosom naught but calm is found.

Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away?
In Jesus' keeping we are safe and they.

Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?
Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

It is enough; earth's struggles soon shall cease,
And Jesus calls us to heaven's perfect peace.

EDWARD H. BICKERSTETH.

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death.— 2 KINGS XX. 1.

PALACE walls cannot shut out sickness. Kings and queens, as well as peasants, must yield to the touch of disease and pain. People who live in a plain, humble way very often feel that somehow this world's troubles have easier access to them than to the rich, who live in a grand way. Sometimes they envy those who dwell in the great houses, and fancy that brown-stone walls exclude most of the ills of life.

But they make a mistake; no splendid doors can shut out trouble. The healthiest people in the world are well-to-do working people, who earn their bread by honest toil — the healthiest and the happiest too. Wealth and high station bring more cares than they shut out. The tall peaks are more conspicuous than the little hills, but they are swept by more storms. Contentment, with plainness and God's blessing, is the lesson.

One stormy night during the American civil war some one in conversation with Mr. Lincoln was pitying the soldiers in the field. The President replied, that there was not one of them with whom he would not gladly exchange places that night. Responsibility brings burdens.

> Released from that fraternal law
> Which shares the common bale and bliss,
> No sadder lot could folly draw
> Or sin provoke from fate than this.
>
> J. G. WHITTIER.

August 10.

Turn you at my reproof. — PROVERES i. 23.

WE must be always turning if we would keep our life true and according to God's commandments. There are some flowers which always turn toward the sun. There was a little potted rose-bush in a sick-room which I visited. It sat in the window. One day I noticed that the one rose on the bush was looking toward the light. I referred to it; and the sick woman said that her daughter had turned the rose around several times toward the darkness of the room, but that each time the little flower had twisted itself back, until again its face was toward the light. It would not look into the darkness.

The rose taught me a lesson — never to allow myself to look toward any gloom, but instantly to turn from it. Not a moment should we permit our eyes to be inclined toward anything sinful. To yield to one moment's sinful act is to defile the soul. The Bible says in its every verse, "Turn from the wrong, the base, the low, the unworthy, to the right, the pure, the noble, the godlike." We should not allow even an unholy thought to stay a moment in our mind, but should turn from its very first suggestion, with face full toward Christ, the Holy One.

But we should train ourselves to turn also from all shadows and discouragements. There is always a bright side, and we should find it. Discouragement is full of danger. It weakens and hurts the life.

August 11.

Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. — PROVERBS viii. 10.

IT is hard to convince people in these days that anything is or can be better than silver or gold or rubies. The best way, however, to look at this subject is to think of some of the greater and deeper needs of life, and ask what these precious things of earth can do to meet them.

Dr. Arnot represents a party of emigrants wrecked on a desert island, far from the tracks of men. They get ashore with their stores. They have food to last for a time. The soil is rich and the climate fine. Soon, however, they find gold, and instantly they all begin to search for the precious metal. They gather much, and are rich; but they have not sown a grain of seed, and no harvest is coming, while the season for sowing is past. Famine is upon them, and their gold will not feed their hunger.

This illustrates the value of that wisdom which is bread for the life. In the great needs of life, money and jewels amount to nothing; only the grace of God will do then. In the time of great sorrow no one turns to gold or diamonds for comfort. In the sore struggles of life, in its temptations, hardships, and perplexities, these symbols of earthly wealth will not meet the needs of the soul. When death comes, these things are utterly worthless, are indeed bitter mockeries. We need in these experiences a help greater than earth's.

August 12.

All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made thee glad. — PSALM xlv. 8.

WE cannot guard too carefully the influences which we allow to play upon our life, for all of them leave their hue and impress upon us, either for beauty or for marring. A great artist refused to look upon the works of inferior artists, saying that they would affect his style. We should seek continual intercourse with the good, the pure, the holy; for in close, sympathetic mingling with them we unconsciously receive into our own spirit something of their sweetness, their beauty, and the aroma of heavenliness that surrounds them. We absorb something of whatever we see or touch.

"Oh! there are some who, while on earth they dwell,
And seem to differ little from the throng,
Already to the heavenly choir belong,
And even hear the same sweet anthem swell;

They joy at times, with joy unspeakable,
Pouring to him they love their heartfelt song;
While to behold him face to face they long,
As the parched traveller for the cooling well.

Ask you how such from others may be known?
Mark those whose look is calm, their brow serene,
Gentle their words, love breathing in each tone,
Scattering rich blessings all around, unseen.

They draw each hour, from living founts above,
The streams they pour around of peace and joy and love."

Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good. — PSALM cxliii. 10.

THERE are so many possibilities in life, in attainment and achievement, and so many opportunities of doing good, that it is a glorious thing to live. Surely, then, we ought to make the most of our life, not failing to become what Christ would have us to be, or to do the sweet things he would have us do as we pass along the way.

Yet life's lessons must always be learned slowly. St. Paul was well on in life when he said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." The words suggest that the lesson was not easily learned; that it required time and struggle. It is only fair to infer that St. Paul could not have written thus in his earliest epistles. There is comfort in this for us common mortals, who in younger or middle life grow discouraged because we have not St. Paul's contentment. If only we are really learning the lesson, there is hope that some day we shall be able to say we have learned it.

The soul alone, like a neglected harp,
Grows out of tune, and needs a hand divine;
Dwell thou within it, tune and touch the chords,
Till every note and string shall answer thine!

Abide in me! There have been moments pure
When I have seen thy face and felt thy power;
Then evil lost its grasp, and passion, hushed,
Owned the divine enchantment of the hour.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

August 14.

They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. — ISAIAH xli. 6.

IT was Charles Kingsley who said, "We become like God only as we become of use." The saying is truer than at first we may think. Every glimpse we have of heaven's life is a glimpse of usefulness, helpfulness. In olden days angels sometimes came down to earth, and always they came on some errand of service to men. Then, we are told in our New Testament that the mission of the angels to earth is "to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation." Thus these pure creatures of heaven live only to serve. God himself is revealed on every Scripture page, and always in the same character of helpfulness. Christ came as God incarnate; and his whole life is summed up in the words, "He went about doing good." Thus the divine life finds its expression in serving, doing good. "God is love;" and love cannot but minister and bless, even to the point of utter self-sacrifice.

"Oh, what a little thing can turn
A heavy heart from sighs to song!
A smile can make the world less stern,
A word can cause the soul to burn
With glow of heaven, all night long.

It needs not that love's gift be great, —
Some splendid jewel of the soul
For which a king might supplicate, —
Nay! true love's least, at love's true rate,
Is tithe most royal of the whole."

August 15.

I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. — PSALM xl. 1.

HAS God taught you some great truth, or revealed to you, in deep personal experience, some new, sweet thought of his love? What is the next thing? Is it not that you shall whisper the blessed secret to some other soul? After Peter's strange vision he sat pondering what it could mean; and while he thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, "Behold, three men seek thee." The picture is very suggestive When we have gotten anything from God, there is always some one waiting to get from us what God has just given to us. Heavenly visions are not shown to us to be absorbed in our own soul, but to be translated into some form that will bless the world. That is what the artist does with his visions. That is what we should do with ours.

Scarcely have I asked in prayer
That which others might not share.
I who hear with sacred shame
Praise that paineth more than blame,
Rich alone in favors lent,
Virtuous by accident,
Doubtful, where I fain would rest,
Frailest, where I seem the best,
Only strong for lack of test, —
What am I that I should press
Special pleas of selfishness,
Coolly mounting into heaven
On my neighbor unforgiven?

J. G. WHITTIER.

We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is.— 1 JOHN iii. 2.

BISHOP THOBURN tells a beautiful story about a picture of his dead child. It seemed a very imperfect photograph, so blurred that scarcely a trace of the loved features could be seen in it. But one day he took the picture to a photographer, and asked him if he could do anything to improve it. In three weeks the bishop returned; and as he saw the picture in its frame on the wall, he was startled. It seemed as if his child were living again before him. The image had been in the old picture, but was concealed beneath the blurs and mists that were there also. The artist, however, had brought it out in strong, living beauty, until it was like life in its tender charm.

In every true disciple of Christ there is the image of the Master. It may be very dim. Its features are overlaid by blurs and blemishes, and are almost unrecognizable by human eyes. It is the work of Christ in our lives to bring out this likeness, more and more clearly, until at last it shines in undimmed beauty. This is what Christ is doing in many of his ways with us.

"Who from unsightly bulb or slender root
Could guess aright
The story of the flower, the fern, the fruit,
In summer's height?
Through tremulous shadows voices call to me,
'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.'"

Jesus said, Let her alone . . . she hath wrought a good work on me. — ST. MARK xiv. 6.

UTILITY is not the only test. Acts may be beautiful in Christ's sight, even though they do not seem to be immediately helpful to others. Mary's deed fed no poor, relieved no sick, clothed no shivering child, and yet Jesus commended it. He is pleased when offerings are made from love to him, even though the things offered may not be necessary to his work. There is no real strengthening in the ornamental parts of a church building; yet who will say that all ornamentation is wrong? Is not God pleased when we honor his house by making it beautiful as well as strong?

We may not measure all our services to Christ by the standard of direct helpfulness to others. Mary's ointment, spilled over Christ's head and feet, was not a really useful ministry, and yet it was good and beautiful in Christ's sight. What shall we say of the loveliness which God lavishes everywhere in nature? Does the beauty of the flowers, of the skies, feed the hunger of the poor? Evidently it was Mary's love for Christ that pleased him, and made her deed beautiful. She had indeed wrought a good work on him, one that blessed him; for in the great sorrow of his heart as he drew near his cross, nothing could so strengthen him as love. It made him stronger for the journey to his cross. Nothing else that we can give another will be such a blessing as love.

August 18.

He called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them. — ST. MATTHEW xviii. 2.

WHEN the disciples wanted to know who was greatest, Jesus called a little child, and took him on his knee. The disciples were clustered around him, and saw what he did. A little child in the midst is used ofttimes to teach great lessons to older people. When a new baby comes into a home, God sets it in the midst of a family as a teacher. Parents suppose they are training their children, but the children are also teaching and training them.

I learned more of the meaning of the fatherhood of God, and of the way he feels toward his children, in one week after the first baby came into my home, than I had learned from teachers and books, even from the Bible, in all the preceding years of my life. Every child's life is a book, a new page of which is turned over each day.

Children are not angels, and yet they bring from heaven to earth many fragments of loveliness. Their influence in a home is a benediction. They soften hearts; they change the whole thought of life in their parents. It is no more self; they begin to live for their children. The children open love's chambers. They train their parents in patience, gentleness, thoughtfulness. While a young child is in a home a school of heaven is set up there. Sad is it for those within, if they miss the chance of learning such blessed lessons.

August 19.

Tribulation worketh patience. — ROMANS v. 3.

PATIENCE is a great lesson to learn. Any school in which we can learn it is a good school, and the lesson can scarcely be too costly. Few things mean more in life than patience. Many people wreck the best hopes of their life for want of patience. Jesus said, "In your patience ye shall win your lives." That is, to be impatient in certain conditions is to lose all; and to be patient, to be able to keep quiet and still in the presence of things that try us, is to gain all. Thus patience becomes the very key to success in living. It is surely worth while to learn the lesson.

Patience is ofttimes learned in the school of suffering. We are there trained to endure; not to cry out in the hour of anguish, but to sing instead. Richter tells of the little bird that is shut away in the darkness to learn new strains, which afterward it sings in the light. Many Christians are taken into the darkness, and kept there for a time, while they are taught the songs of patience. We look at patient people with admiration, not knowing what it has cost them to get this pearl of the graces.

"Angel of patience, sent to calm
Our feverish brows with cooling balm,
To lay the storms of hope and fear,
And reconcile life's smile and tear,
The throbs of wounded pride to still,
And make our own our Father's will.'

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. — JOB i. 21.

GOD'S love is the same in the brightness, and when the brightness fades into gloom. It is the same in joy, and when the joy turns to grief. It is the same when blessings are given, and when the blessings are recalled. It does not seem so to us; we easily believe that while God showers favors upon us he loves us; but when he gives sorrow, we almost feel that he does not love us as before. Yet it may be that there are even richer blessings in the things which make us grieve than in those which give us gladness. We know at least that the same love sends both. That should be comfort for us. It is always love that comes from God, in whatsoever form or guise it comes. We need never doubt that this is true.

"So, day by day and step by step, sustain thy failing strength;
From strength to strength, indeed, go on through all the journey's length.
God bids thee tarry now and then, forbear the weak complaint;
God's leisure brings the weary rest, and cordial gives the faint.
God bids thee labor, and the place is thick with thorn and brier;
But he will share the hardest task, until he calls thee higher.
So take each disappointment, friend; 'tis at thy Lord's command!
Shall God's appointment seem less good than what thyself had planned?"

August 21.

The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time. — JONAH iii. 1.

JONAH had failed the first time, but God gave him a second chance. This shows the divine patience. Strict justice would have left Jonah at the bottom of the sea, or in the maw of the fish; but God was merciful to him. He had now gone through a discipline which left him ready to obey.

That is the way God often deals with people in our own days. When they rebel or disobey him he does not cast them off, but puts them under some discipline, sometimes sore and painful, to teach them obedience, and then tries them again. Many of us have to be whipped to duty; but what a blessed thing it is that God is so patient with us! Most of us owe all we are to his disciplines. Thus even our falls may become blessings to us.

We should be very thankful to God for these second chances that he gives us when we have failed to improve the first chance. Very few people make of their life what God first wanted them to make. Then he sets them another lesson, that they may try again. Perhaps the second is not so beautiful nor so noble as the first; still it is good, and if they are faithful and diligent, they can make something worthy even yet of their life. Most of us have to be sent more than once on our errands for God. Happy are we if we go even at the second bidding, although it is far better that we go at first.

So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. — JONAH iii. 3.

JONAH had learned his lesson well. We are not told where he was after his deliverance, but no doubt he had a quiet time for thought. He thought over the story of his wilfulness and disobedience, no doubt, and was ashamed of his conduct. Thus he learned humility, and was ready now to do as God might command him. Indeed, he became eager for another opportunity to do the work which at first he had refused to do.

There is a story of a regiment of soldiers which in some war had been dishonored on a certain battle-field. In the next war the same regiment was again in the service, and at the first opportunity they displayed most heroic courage, thus "burning out the shame" of the former field. So Jonah in his penitence would long for another chance to go for God to Nineveh, that he might wipe out the dishonor of his former disobedience.

So we see prompt obedience this time, no quibbling, no running away. We ought to get the lesson. When we have failed in any task that God has set for us, or broken any command that he has given to us, not only should our repentance lead us to sorrow and confession, but we should eagerly prepare ourselves for burning out the shame of our past sin and dishonor by a service and an obedience worthy of sincere love for Christ. Thus alone do we make our repentance worthy.

Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. — 2 KINGS xiii. 14.

A DEATH-BED is a good place from which to look at one's own life. In the strange, dim light that pours in from eternity, things do not appear as they did in the common sunlight. Many things that gave pleasure as life went on, give pain and shame now in the retrospect, and appear calamitous. This is true of all sins and follies, of all gains and pleasures that did not have God's benediction, of all things done for self and not for Christ, of all quarrels and strifes.

Many things also that seemed hard when they came, and that cost pain and self-denial, in the light of the death-chamber appear radiant and beautiful. Thus the dying hour is the place to test life. If we would always ask, before doing any doubtful thing, "How will this look when I am dying?" it would save us from many a mistake and sin.

But the death-bed is also a good place for other people to study a man's life. When a man is engaged in the affairs of the world, he suffers more or less from the envy of others. The more active and influential he is, the more are men about him envious of him. But when a man lies dying, all this unjust feeling vanishes. All men feel kindly toward him. Whatever has been faulty in him is forgotten in the glow of tenderness that his dying enkindles; and whatever has been beautiful in him shines out in still fairer beauty.

August 24.

As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet. — 2 KINGS xiii. 21.

THE bones of Elisha had no more power in themselves to give life than any other dead man's bones. Yet we may get here the lesson of posthumous influence. No man ever wholly dies. We have nothing to do with superstitious nonsense about relics, — saints' bones, and bits of good men's clothing or of their coffins; but it is true that a really good man has influence after he dies. He leaves behind him something which cannot die. His name has power. If he writes good books, these live after him, and give life to the souls that their words touch. We ought ever to seek to live so as not only to be missed and mourned when we die, but to live on after death in our works, our name, our influence.

"Wayside roses droop and fade,
Bloom and die their own sweet way;
We know not where their fragrance goes —
Floating, floating, day by day.

Pass the foot-sore travellers,
Breathing in the dusty air;
They catch the odor of the flowers,
And bless the grateful perfume there.

Such our lives. Sweet words of kindness
Fall, — we know not where or when;
Like the fragrance of the roses,
Reaching far beyond our ken."

Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him a message unto Mordecai. — ESTHER iv. 10.

WE are apt to overlook the minor actors in Scripture stories in our absorbed interest in the prominent ones. Yet ofttimes these lesser people are just as important in their own place, and their service is just as essential to the final success of the whole, as the greater ones. The little girl in the story of Naaman is scarcely seen in the splendors of the Syrian court; but without her part we should never have had the story at all. The lad with the basket is hardly thought of when we read the account of the miracle; but they were his loaves with which the Master fed all those hungry thousands that day on the green grass. The smallest links in a chain are ofttimes quite as important as the greatest links.

Hatach was one of these obscure characters. But his part was by no means unimportant. If he had been a different sort of a man, Mordecai's communication with Esther would have been impossible. He was a trustworthy messenger. If we cannot do brave things like Esther, nor give wise counsels like Mordecai, we may at least be useful, as Hatach was, in faithful service. And perhaps our lowly part may some day prove to have been as essential as the great deeds which all men praise. We may at least help some others in doing the great things that they are set to do in this world.

If thou altogether holdest thy peace . . . thou and thy father's house shall perish. — ESTHER iv. 14.

THE only safe way in life's thronging field is straight on in the path of duty. He who falters and hesitates even for one instant, is trodden down by the marching hosts behind him. No danger of the battle is so great as that of halting and trying to turn backward.

The same is true in all the paths of life. No duty, however hard and perilous, should be feared one-half so much as failure in the duty. People sometimes shrink from responsibility, saying they dare not accept it because it is so great. But in shrinking from duty they are really encountering a far more serious condition than that which they evade. It is a great deal easier to do that which God gives us to do, no matter how hard it is, than to face the responsibility of not doing it. We have abundant assurance that we shall receive all the strength we need to perform any duty God allots to us; but if we fall out of the line of obedience, and refuse to do anything which we ought to do, we find ourselves at once out of harmony with God's law and God's providence, and cannot escape the consequences of our failure.

So it is always in the end easier and infinitely safer to do our duty, whatever it may involve of cost or peril, than not to do it. To drop out of the ranks in life's crowded pathway is to lose all. To neglect opportunities is to throw away honors and crowns.

If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place. — ESTHER iv. 14.

OFTEN we sin by speaking, and do incalculable harm with our words. But there are times when it is a sin not to speak, when to be silent is to fail in duty. We are not to speak out the wrong thoughts that may be in our heart, but the good thoughts and feelings which burn within us it is usually our duty to utter. We should never hesitate to speak out boldly in confession of Christ when his honor is assailed by his enemies. To walk with an impenitent friend day after day and year after year, in close association with him, and never to speak a word to him about his spiritual life, is to commit a grievous sin against him.

We have many cautions about watching our speech, and withholding words that are not good; but we need to beware also lest we fail to speak the words we ought to speak. Especially should we beware of silence about spiritual and eternal things. God gives to each of us a message — a message of life to others; we dare not fail to deliver it. We scarcely ever lack words when the themes are trivial; but amid the trivial talk, let us not fail to speak some word which shall not be forgotten.

"Yea, find thou always time to say some earnest word
Between the idle talk, lest with thee henceforth,
Night and day, regret should walk."

Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? — ESTHER iv. 14.

ONE reason Esther was in the palace at this time as queen, was for this very mission, — to save her people by interceding for them. She was not there by accident. We know the singular providences by which she came to her place.

We live under the same providence, and nothing is accidental in the circumstances of our lives. If we are true to God, doing his will day by day, we are always in the place where he wants us to be; and wherever we are he has something for us to do there. Each day God sets our work for us. When we find ourselves in the presence of any human need or sorrow, we should say, "Perhaps God sent me here now, just to bring relief or to give help or comfort." Sometimes we wonder at the strange ways of providence, by which we are carried into this place or that; is there not a key to this mystery?

It certainly was a strange providence that led Esther, the lowly, simple-hearted Jewish maiden, into the palace of the great Xerxes to be his queen; but there was a divine purpose in it. She was sent there because she would be needed there by and by. When God, by some strange providence, brings us into peculiar circumstances or associations, it is because at some time there will be need for us there. We must be careful that we do always the thing we find there to do.

I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. — NEHEMIAH i. 4.

YEARS were not all. Nehemiah also carried the burden to God in prayer. He did this before he took any step himself for the relief of the suffering and the advancement of his work. Compassion is Christlike; but tears alone are not enough. This is a lesson we should not forget in our compassion for others. God cares more for them than we do, and his compassion is deeper than ours; we may, therefore, be sure of interest upon his part when we speak the names of our friends in his ear. Besides, he knows best how to help. We should take the burden to him first, and then be ready to do what he may tell us to do.

The best way for us to help others usually is to pray for them. Of course praying is not all we should do; Nehemiah did not stop with tears and prayers. He gave himself to the work in behalf of his people. He left his luxurious palace, and journeyed away to Jerusalem, and took earnest hold with both hands, giving all his energy and influence to the cause. More than tears and prayers are needed; there is something for us to do. Many people can weep over distress, and then pray fervently for the relief that is needed, but never do anything themselves. Nehemiah's way is better, — sympathy, prayer, work. This makes a threefold cord which cannot be broken.

But we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night. — NEHEMIAH iv. 9.

WE are in danger of making prayer a substitute for duty, or of trying to roll over on God the burden of caring for us and doing things for us, while we sit still and do nothing. When we pray to be delivered from temptation, we must keep out of the way of temptation unless duty clearly calls us there. We must also watch against temptation, resist the Devil, and stand firm in obedience and faith. When we ask God for our daily bread, pleading the promise that we shall not want, we must also be ready to earn God's bread, and thus make it ours honestly. A lazy man came once and asked alms, saying that he could not find bread for his family. "Nor can I," replied the industrious mechanic to whom he had applied. "I am obliged to work for it."

While we pray for health, we must use the means to obtain it. While we ask for wisdom, we must use our brains and think, searching for wisdom as for hid treasure. While we ask God to help us break off a bad habit, we must also strive to overcome the habit. Prayer is not a mere device for saving people from toil, struggle, and responsibility. When there is no human power adequate to the need, we may ask God to work without us, and in some way he will help us. But ordinarily we must do our part, asking God to work in and through us, and to bless us through faithful obedience.

Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed; . . . so that we are not able to build. — NEHEMIAH iv. 10.

THERE are always croakers and discouragers. They find fault with their part of the work, and object to the methods of those in charge. We remember how it was with the spies sent to look over the promised land. It was a good country, they said, rich and fertile, but, oh, the giants that were there! So ten frightened men discouraged a whole nation. People are forever making it harder for others to live by going about with their murmurings and groanings.

These people of Judah in Nehemiah's time seem to have been only half-hearted. They were not willing to make sacrifices to get the city rebuilt. Nothing good is ever accomplished without cost. Gold is not picked up in the streets. Half-heartedness is not weakness merely; it is sin. All through the ages men who have been blessings to the world have been willing to bear burdens that were too heavy for them. Easy living never accomplished much for God or the world.

Some murmur when the sky is clear
And wholly bright to view,
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue;
And some with thankful love are filled
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy, gild
The darkness of their night.

R. C. TRENCH.

September 1.

Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, . . . and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. — NEHEMIAH iv. 14.

EVERY one with a spark of manhood in him will fight to the death for his own. We are all so tied up together that this motive is really present in all our defending of the right. We must seek the safety of the town in which we live because our family is in it, and peril to the place is peril to ours. We must seek wholesome water supply, good drainage, and clean streets for the town, because our children and friends live there. So with the moral and religious influences of the community; the welfare of our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, is involved. A man may have no interest in the fight against the saloon; but if the evil be let alone, by and by his own boys may be destroyed by it.

A distinguished man was speaking at the opening of a reformatory for boys, and remarked that if only one boy were saved from ruin it would pay for all the cost. After the exercises were over a gentleman asked him if he had not put it too strongly when he said that all the cost of founding such an institution would be repaid if only one boy should be saved. "Not if it were my boy," was the answer. It is only when we learn to look at all such movements as if we were working for our own, that we do our best work.

September 2.

Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon; and the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side. — NEHEMIAH iv. 17, 18.

WE should all work on the wall of God's temple, every one building over against his own door. We should never slack in our diligence; there is some duty for each moment. But we work amid enemies. On every side are those who oppose us, and are ready to assault us and to stop us in our service. The Christian young man in the store or shop, in the school or college, is constantly exposed to temptation. His companions are not all godly. Some of them will seek to draw him away from Christ. In his own heart, too, there are enemies which resist the good that is striving within him and seek his destruction.

So while he works he must also be ready any instant to fight. Every Christian should have his sword girded continually by his side. The Christian's sword is "the word of God." The best preparation, therefore, for meeting the world's enmity is to become filled with the Holy Scriptures. There come many occasions through life when a verse quoted will be a sword drawn to smite an enemy. Thus it was that Jesus vanquished the tempter, at each temptation drawing out a word of God, and with it smiting the adversary. So we all may learn to fight, building ever on the wall of character, and ever thrusting back the enemy that assails us.

September 3.

Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. — NEHEMIAH viii. 10.

GOD loves to have us enjoy ourselves. He does not want us to be long-faced; joy is the ideal Christian life. Of course we are to be sorry when we sin; but when we have confessed the sin, truly repented of it, and found mercy, we are to dry our tears and rejoice. Why should we not be happy when God has forgiven us, made us his children, and assured us of everlasting glory?

But our joy must not be selfish. When we are prosperous, we should not forget those who are poor; when we are happy in our homes of love, with unbroken circles, we should not forget the families that are in sorrow. The good things God gives us are not meant for ourselves alone. They are given us to be passed on. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." People who keep all to themselves, and eat the fat and drink the sweet in their own houses, at their own well-covered tables, never thinking of the hungry ones outside, are not the kind of children God wants them to be. The very essence of Christian life is unselfishness.

The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need;
Not what we give, but what we share —
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three —
Himself, his hungry neighbor, and me.

J. R. LOWELL.

September 4.

Neither be ye grieved; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. — NEHEMIAH viii. 10.

IF we would be strong for service, and would do our best always, we must cultivate a joyful spirit. No duty is urged in the Bible more earnestly than the duty of Christian joy. Of course we must make sure that it is the joy of the Lord we have. We must draw the water of our gladness out of the wells of salvation, not out of the muddy pools of earth. The joy of the Lord comes from the heart of Christ. When we have this joy we are strong; for joy inspires us, fills us with hope and courage. When we can sing at our toil, or in our sorrow, we are in no danger of being overcome.

Forget the past, and live the present hour;
Now is the time to work, the time to fill
The soul with noblest thoughts, the time to will
Heroic deeds, to use whatever dower
Heaven has bestowed, to test our utmost power.
Now is the time to love, and better still,
To serve our loved ones, over passing ill
To rise triumphant; thus the perfect flower
Of life shall come to fruitage; wealth amass
For grandest giving ere the time be gone.
Be glad to-day, to-morrow may bring tears;
Be brave to-day, the darkest night will pass,
And golden rays will usher in the dawn;
Who conquers now shall rule the coming years.

SARAH K. BOLTON.

September 5.

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia . . . he hath charged me to build him an house. — EZRA i. 2.

IT comforts us to know that nothing is going wrong in this world, though at times all seems confusion. It ought to comfort us to know that there is One, greater than men, who rules over all things. A little boy sat in front of his father in a carriage, and held the reins. But his father held them too, although the boy did not know it. Presently the boy felt one of the reins drawn through his little hands. He understood it then, and said, "Father, I thought I was driving; but I am not, am I?" We think we are doing great things, but there is One behind us whose hand really holds the reins.

"Pull, little maid!" he would cheer me, but still kept his hand on the oar,
Though sometimes I'd try to turn us to some pretty nook on the shore;
Still straight went the boat to the harbor, and as I grew stronger each day,
I found that the only wisdom was in rowing my father's way.

And I think, sir, that God our Father keeps hold of the world just so.
We may strive and struggle our utmost, that we may stronger grow,
Stronger and wiser and humbler, till at last we can understand
The beauty and peace of his keeping the oar through all life in his hand.

Whosoever there is among you of all his people . . . let him go up . . . and build the house of the Lord. — EZRA i. 3.

THERE is another temple to build for the Lord, and builders are wanted. The proclamation comes now, not from a heathen king, but from Christ himself. Every one is invited to take part in this great work. The temple at Jerusalem, on which these builders wrought, has long since perished, and every trace of their work has been destroyed. But the temple for which Christ seeks builders shall stand forever, and everything any one may do on it shall be eternal.

How can we build on the heavenly temple? By doing all we can in this world for Christ. Our own lives are parts of the temple. We may seek to have our characters made beautiful and holy. Then we can strive to bring others to Christ, to make other lives better, to help build up in them a likeness to the Lord Jesus. The smallest things we can do for Christ will be like the stones laid on the walls of God's great house, which is rising within the veil, or like ornaments, little touches of beauty, on some part of the glorious building. We cannot see now that our work is of any value, but some day we shall see that nothing which we have done with pure motive for our Lord has been done in vain. No touch laid on another life in love shall ever fade out.

The children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest . . . kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. — EZRA vi. 16.

IT was a glad occasion when that building stood there completed on the sacred mount. It had risen out of ruins. It had cost great sacrifice and toil. It had been built up amid many discouragements and hindrances. Tears had fallen on many a stone as it was lifted to its place.

Things we do through cost, self-denial, hardship, and hindrance are far dearer to us and more sacred than things we do with ease, without feeling the burden or the cost. Churches built by poor, struggling congregations, whose people have to sacrifice and deny themselves to gather the money, yield far more joy to their builders when finished than beautiful and costly churches reared by the rich. They are built out of people's hearts, and shine in heaven's sight in love's splendor.

Our joy in doing God's work, and in making gifts to God, is measured by the real cost of the things we do and give. The more heart's blood there is in them, the more precious will they be to us and also to God. The richest treasures of our lives are those which have cost us the most.

All common good has common price;
Exceeding good exceeding;
Christ bought the keys of Paradise
By cruel bleeding.

J. G. HOLLAND.

September 8.

In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai. — HAGGAI ii. 1.

THE Lord always seeks to be an encourager. These returned captives were very much discouraged. They had begun with great enthusiasm to build the temple, but difficulties had risen. Then the Lord sent his servant to hearten the governor and the people, to cheer them, that they might go on through all the obstacles which faced them. That is the way the Lord is always doing with his children. He does not want us ever to yield to discouragement.

Of course life is hard at many a point. There are ofttimes difficult tasks to perform, and sore struggles to endure. Things often seem to fail in our hands. Our plans miscarry, our hopes disappoint us. We meet opposition and enmity, and it seems to us we can never get through with the things we are set to do. But when we open the Bible we find encouragement on every page. We are there taught never to yield to despair. There can be no failure in duty if only we are faithful. We never can be defeated in temptation if only we stand true to Christ. We never can sink under our burden, if only we cast it upon Christ. The things that seem to be failures become successes when God's hand is in them. So God ever comes to encourage us in our difficulties. "Fear not; I am with you," is the formula of divine cheer in every hour of trial. Therefore we should never lose heart.

September 9.

I waited patiently for the Lord. — PSALM xl. 1.

THERE come times in every one's life when no exertion of his own can do anything, and when no human power can help. Then he should commit all to God, and wait for him. And it is no ignorant confidence that we may have at such times; for our Father rules this world, and has a plan for each life. We can safely trust him to bring aid, deliverance, or light at the right time.

There are occasions when a patient waiting is our highest duty. When we are working for souls we must present the truth, and then commit the result to God. Time is necessary for some spiritual processes, and the result cannot come immediately. In prayer we sometimes have to wait for the answer, even to wait long, but we should never be impatient.

The days went by, but nothing brought
 Beyond the wonted round of care;
And I was vexed with anxious thought,
 And found the waiting hard to bear.
But when I said, "In vain I pray!"
I heard him answer gently, "Nay."

So praying still, and waiting on,
 And pondering what the waiting meant,
This knowledge sweet at last I won, —
 And oh, the depth of my content!
My blessed task for every day
Is humbly, gladly, to obey.

HARRIET MCEWEN KIMBALL.

September 10.

And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have seen, and behold, a candlestick all of gold, and its bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon. —ZECHARIAH iv. 2.

A CANDLESTICK suggests light. Every Christian should be a light-bearer. God wants us to shine. The world is dark, and we are to pour light into its darkness. Our character must shine. That means, to put it very simply, that we must be good. To be good is to be first pure in heart. A little child said she liked best of all the beatitudes the one about a pure heart, because if she had that blessing she would have all the others too. A pure, good, loving heart will make a life shine. "God is love," and we are like God just so far as we are loving. That means love to God first, and then love to all men. We are therefore to be obedient, trustful, and reverent toward God, and gentle, unselfish, patient, thoughtful, kindly and helpful toward men.

We will find that it is not always easy to shine with love's light. The candle wastes, burns itself up, in shining. So does life. It costs to be unselfish, patient, thoughtful, and useful. We have to be forgiving, to bear injuries sweetly, to deny ourselves and make personal sacrifices, continually, in order to be gentle, patient, and kind when others are rude to us. It costs to shine; nevertheless we are to shine. Christ gave his blessed life to be consumed on the candlestick of divine love, to light the world.

September 11.

Be strong all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work. — HAGGAI ii. 4.

THERE are many times in most people's lives when this fragment of a lesson ought to be inspiring and helpful. Men are called to do some work for God, and their resources of strength appear to be altogether inadequate. They look at the small beginning or the unpromising condition, and say they never can do the work, nor achieve the result expected. Nearly all beginnings of good things are small. The Christian church began with two followers. Missionary efforts have all had a most unpromising start.

In our individual lives the same thing is true. It does not seem to us that we can ever accomplish anything worthy with our feeble strength. But the word of God rings out: "Be strong, and work; for I am with you." God never gives us a duty but that he means to help us with his presence and strength so that we need not fail in it. If we lose heart, and let our hands hang down in idleness, nothing will come of the little beginning, and God's purpose will fail in our hands through our own lack of earnestness. But if we do our whole duty, the end will be blessing and success.

"That trust is sweetest and that faith the best
Which, having done such share
As human life demands, then leaves the rest
To the dear Father's care."

September 12.

The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee. — ZECHARIAH iii. 2.

THE Lord is the friend of his people, and will not stand by inactive when Satan is plotting against any of them. He is the defender especially of the defenceless. This characteristic of the divine love is revealed in all parts of the Scriptures. God is the God of the weak. In the Mosaic laws definite provision was made for the widow and the orphan. Something was to be left for them when the harvests were gathered. The poor were put under special protection, to shield them from the oppression of the rich and the strong. God's thought for the poor appeared amid even the detailed laws given for common life.

Every child of God is an object of peculiar divine care. The weakest of his children is safe in his keeping, even amid the greatest dangers. No harm can come to any of them while nestling in his bosom. We may safely leave our defending in the Lord's hands when Satan assails us, and when any one would do us harm.

Our Father, deliver thy children from sin,
From evil without and from evil within,
From this world, with its manifold evil and wrong,
From the wiles of the Evil One, subtle and strong;
Till, as Christ overcame, we, too, conquer and sing,
"All glory to thee, our victorious King,
For thine is the power."

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL.

Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? — 2 KINGS iv. 28.

THE woman's thought seems to have been, "It would have been better had I remained as I was, with no voice of love in my home, my heart unfilled with affection, than that I should know and experience the gladness of motherhood for this brief time, and then be robbed of the joy."

No doubt similar thoughts ofttimes come to those who are bereft of friends. In their deep grief it seems to them that it would have been better if they had never had their friends at all than to have had them a little while, to have learned to love them so, and to find such blessing in them, and then to lose them. But Tennyson's word in "In Memoriam" is far more true than this: —

> "'Tis better to have loved and lost,
> Than never to have loved at all."

Loving itself blesses us. It opens our heart and enriches our life. It teaches us the true meaning of life; for to live truly is to love. Then the taking away of our dear one does not rob us of the blessings which loving wrought in us. These we keep forever, though the friend be with us no more. Even if this child had not been restored to the mother in this world, she would still have kept forever the impressions and the influences which the child in its brief, beautiful years had left upon her life.

That seeing they may see, and not perceive. — ST. MARK iv. 12.

IT is a mistake not to use one's eyes to see things that are to be seen. The result is that in the end one has no eyes with which to see. Refusing to listen to the words of God that are spoken in gentleness and love, results in the loss of the power to hear, so that in all God's universe of love one shall hear no sweet sound; so that the very voices of tender mercy shall become screams of terror. Refusing to understand the things of God leads to the dulling and deadening of the soul, so that at last one cannot understand if he would.

We should learn to keep all the gates of our soul open toward heaven. We should train ourselves to see whatever God would show us. Thus shall our eyes become able to see more and more beauty in God and in all his works. We should keep our ears attent to hear every word that God speaks to us. We should strive to understand what God teaches us; for to those who seek, all hidden mysteries at length become clear.

"There's many a gem in the path of life,
Which we pass in our idle pleasure,
That is richer far than the jewelled crown
Or the miser's hoarded treasure;
It may be the love of a little child,
Or the mother's prayer to heaven,
Or only a beggar's grateful thanks,
For a cup of water given."

Jesus . . . turned him about in the crowd, and said, Who touched my garments? — ST. MARK v. 30.

THE crowd was close about Jesus, and many people touched him; but there was one touch different from the others. There was a heart's cry in it, a pleading, a piteous supplication. It was a touch of faith, inspired by a deep sense of need. It was not an accidental touch, a mere touch of nearness; it was intentional.

This incident illustrates what is going on all the while about Christ. We cannot move without pressing up against him. Sometimes in our heedlessness we jostle him rudely. But when among all earth's millions one person intentionally reaches out a hand to feel after Christ, to touch him with a purpose, to seek for some blessing, to crave some help, he instantly knows the pressure of that touch, and turns to answer it. He knows when any heart wants him, no matter how obscure the person, how poor, how hidden away in the crowd. Blessing came that day to none in that crowd, so far as we know, save to this poor, sick woman who touched Christ's clothes. It came to her because she had a burden on her heart and sought Christ's help.

So in every company there are some who are close, and yet receive no blessing, because there is no faith in their touching. Then there are those who are no nearer, but who reach out their hands in faith, and touch Christ's clothes, and go away helped, comforted.

Blessed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. — ST. LUKE vi. 20.

THE blessed ones of the Bible are not those whom this world considers happy. Indeed, in the opinion of earth those whom Christ calls blessed have a dreary life. He says the meek are blessed, the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, they that mourn, and they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. It would be hard to convince the man of this world that these are the really blessed ones. But that is the way it appears to the eyes that look down from heaven, and that is the standard of life by which we must be measured in the divine judgment.

It is assuring to hear Jesus himself speak beatitudes for men. He knew who really are the blessed. He knew the difference between the earthly ideals of happiness and the heavenly ideals. We may safely trust his estimates, and know that they are right. We know, too, that he came into this world to make blessedness possible for men who were lost in sin. On the cross he died to make men happy. It is pleasant to remember, too, that the last glimpse this world had of Jesus he was in the attitude of blessing men. He had his hands stretched out over his disciples when he began to ascend. Ever since that moment benedictions have been raining down from those pierced hands upon a sorrowing earth. Those who do not receive blessings shut their hearts against them.

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. — ST. LUKE vii. 13.

A SORROW in a home sends out a wave of tender feeling which impresses a wide community. While crape hangs on a door, almost every one of the great throng of passers-by is made at least for the moment a little more thoughtful. Even strangers going by feel the influence, and their hearts are warmed by it. Whatever thus touches men with a gentler mood, though but transiently, becomes a blessing in the world. There is a humanizing influence in sympathy. It makes men more tolerant of each other, more patient with each other's faults, more loving and thoughtful. That which is changing the world these days from cruelty and savageness into lovingness and brotherliness is a sorrow — the sorrow of Calvary.

My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with cruel wrong;
So turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
One summer Sabbath day, I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burial-place,
Where, pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level, and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrong-doer, each with meekened face
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of our common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart;
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow like a mighty wave
Swept all my pride away, and trembling, I forgave.

J. G. WHITTIER.

A voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my Son, my chosen: hear ye him. — ST. LUKE ix. 35.

MANY of the sweetest revealings of comfort are spoken to God's children out of the clouds of sorrow. Many a Christian learns more about God in a brief season of trouble than he has learned before in years of earthly prosperity. We should never see the stars if the sun did not go down. We should never see the promises that gem the Bible pages, like stars in the sky, were there no darkening of the sky of human prosperity and joy. Out of our clouds, too, comes the Father's voice, saying, "This is my Son." It is Christ who comes even in the shadow that for a time hides and darkens his face. He is in the centre of every cloud.

There is significance also in the other word from the cloud, "Hear ye him." We must learn to listen to Christ and to him only. There are mysteries about Christianity, things hard to be understood, but we may safely wait for the solution of these, meanwhile doing sweetly and quietly the things that Christ bids us do. Hereafter we shall know.

Rain comes out of clouds, and if there is no rain all nature suffers. So out of sorrow's clouds the rain falls, and our lives are enriched thereby.

"The meadow was parched and brown and dry,
And listless drooped each bloom;
So wan and weak, they could hardly sigh,
"If it doesn't rain, we all must die;
Oh, that the rain would come!"

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. — ST. LUKE ix. 23.

THE more important is the position we occupy, and the greater are its responsibilities, the more cares will it bring. The quiet calm is found in the low valley, not on the mountain-top. As we rise in life our burdens increase. We need to learn how to carry our load cheerfully when it gets heavy. We cannot reach the higher places, and miss the steep climbing that leads to them. If we would gain the heights, we must consent to climb up the steep and rugged mountain. It was not a mere dream that visioned life to the patriarch as a ladder.

"Does the road wind uphill all the way?"
"Yes, to the very end!"
"Will the day's journey take the whole long day?"
"From morn to night, my friend!"

"But is there for the night a resting-place?"
"A roof for all when the dark hours begin!"
"May not the darkness hide it from my face?"
"You cannot miss that inn!"

"Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?"
"Those who have gone before!"
"Then must I knock or call when just in sight?"
"They will not keep you standing at that door!"

"Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?"
"Of labor you shall find the sum!"
"Will there be beds for me and all who seek?"
"Yea — beds for all who come!"

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. — ST. JOHN xiv. 15.

LOVE is more than a mere sentiment; it is also a life. The proof of it must be in acts. Thus in one of his epistles this disciple of love writes: "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso has the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth."

This same principle applies to our profession of love for Christ. It is not enough that we sing it in our hymns, say it in our prayers, or utter it in our creed; we must show it in our life. A fruit-tree proves its usefulness by bearing fruit in the season. The rose-bush must prove its right to the distinction by putting forth beautiful roses. And when we claim to be Christ's friends, we must show it by doing what he bids us to do.

Be what thou seemest; live thy creed;
Hold up to earth the torch divine;
Be what thou prayest to be made;
Let the great Master's steps be thine.

Sow love, and taste its fruitage pure;
Sow peace, and reap its harvest bright;
Sow sunbeams on the rock and moor,
And find a harvest-home of light.

September 21.

Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. — ST. MATTHEW XV. 27.

WHEN Jesus spoke to the poor Gentile woman in the language of the time, as if she were but a dog, she was not offended. She was willing to be as a dog under the Master's table. She was ready to grant to the Jews the children's place. The position Jesus had assigned to her satisfied her. For the dogs under the table did not starve. The children were first served, and then the pieces of bread which they let fall belonged to the dogs. Even the crumbs from that table were enough for her. Thus her humility and also her faith were shown. We should come to Christ with a deep sense of our unworthiness, ready to take the lowest place; and we should realize that even the crumbs of his grace and love are better than all the feasts of this world.

Not worthy, Lord, to gather up the crumbs
With trembling hand, that from thy table fall,
A weary, heavy-laden sinner comes
To plead thy promise and obey thy call.

I am not worthy to be thought thy child,
Or sit the last and lowest at thy board;
Too long a wanderer and too oft beguiled,
I only ask one reconciling word.

I hear thy voice; thou bid'st me come and rest;
I come, I kneel, I clasp thy pierced feet:
Thou bid'st me take my place, a welcome guest
Among thy saints, and of thy banquet eat.

September 22.

Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ. — 1 CORINTHIANS xi. 1.

ONE way in which God reveals himself to us is through the lives of the good and the saintly. Next to living in direct communion with him is living with others who thus live with him. Converse with those who lie in Christ's bosom and who know the secret of the Lord cannot but greatly enrich our own knowledge of divine things. Yet in these busy days we are quite in danger of losing almost altogether out of our lives this rich means of grace. One has said: "Do not think it wasted time to submit yourself to any influence which may bring upon you any noble feeling."

The Lord is in his holy place,
In all things near and far;
Shekinah of the snowflake he,
And Glory of the star,
And Secret of the April-land
That stirs the field to flowers,
Whose little tabernacles rise
To hold him through the hours.

He hides himself within the love
Of those we love the best;
The smiles and tones that make our homes
Are shrines by him possessed.
He tents within the lonely heart
And shepherds every thought;
We find him not by seeking long,
We lose him not unsought.

WILLIAM C. GANNETT.

September 23.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. — GALATIANS vi. 7.

PEOPLE have loose notions about sin. They think they can go on through life in disobedience of God's commands, and defiance of all moral laws, and then, by a single act of penitence, in a moment, have all the consequences of their sinning wiped out, all the effects in their own nature of lifelong evil habits reversed, and their character changed into saintly beauty and meetness for the kingdom of heaven.

But the Bible does not teach this. Those who choose sin for their way in life must eat sin's fruit. The fruit of trees drops off, but sin's fruits stay in the life and become part of it. One may sow common seeds, and others gather and eat the harvest; but the sinner must gather and eat the fruit of his own sowing.

We are not through with our life as we live it. Every act, every word, every thought, every choice, is a seed which we drop. We go on carelessly, never dreaming that we shall ever again see our deeds. Then some day we come upon an ugly plant growing somewhere, and we ask, "What is this?" Comes the answer, "I am one of your plants. You dropped the seed which grew into me." Our lives are the little garden plats in which it is our privilege to drop seeds. We shall have to eat the fruits of the seeds of which we are planting these days.

September 24.

Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. — JAMES i. 17.

THERE are many good things that come to us through our friends. The father toils and serves, and leaves an inheritance for his children. Many rich blessings come to us through human affections. Hands are ever being reached out to us, hands of love and kindliness, offering us good things. We owe far more than we ever can estimate to those who love us. The kindly ministry of friends brings countless benefits to our lives.

But every one of these is a blessing sent to us from God. The human hands that bring them are but the hands of messengers. This is only one of God's ways of sending his good things to us. St. James tells us also that all that God gives us is good, and that every boon of his is perfect. Sometimes we think that what we receive from God cannot be good. We think he must have changed toward us. It is a loss or a disappointment, and it seems unkind. But in whatever form it comes, there is a blessing — some good — wrapped up in everything God sends to any of his children.

An easy thing, O Power divine,
To thank thee for these gifts of thine!
For summer's sunshine, winter's snow,
For hearts that kindle, thoughts that glow;
But when shall I attain to this, —
To thank thee for the things I miss?

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON.

Ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saveth you out of all your calamities and your distresses. — 1 SAMUEL X. 19.

WE are very quick to see ingratitude in those whom we have befriended, who forget our kindness and treat us ill. We like to quote in such connection the fable of the serpent, frozen by the wayside, which the benevolent passer-by took up and put in his bosom to warm, but which returned his kindness by striking its deadly fangs into his flesh.

Let us be honest toward God. Let us judge ourselves in relation to his mercies and favors to us by the same rule which we so inexorably apply to our fellow-men. What has God done for us? What mercies and favors have we received from him? From what adversities and tribulations has he delivered us? Are we saved? Are we on the way now to heaven and glory? Who forgave us our sins? Who rescued us out of the hands of Satan? Who keeps us day by day?

There is only one answer. How, then, are we treating this Deliverer, Saviour, and Friend? Do we recognize him as our King and Lord? Or are we rejecting him and demanding another? It is well that we sit down quietly, while this matter is before us, and see whether we are free from the sharp blame which the prophet here lays upon these ancient people. May it not be that we, too, are neglecting the God who has saved us?

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? — PSALM XXVII. 1.

THE thought is, that God is a fortress like stone walls around his people. The same thought is found elsewhere. "The eternal God is thy refuge." "God is our refuge." "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people." It is not said that the Lord builds a refuge about his people, but that he himself is the refuge. He puts himself between them and peril. The stork and other birds, when there is danger, cover their young with their own bodies, receiving the assault themselves and shielding their brood. So Christ said he would gather his people as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. Thus on Calvary he did receive on himself the terrible storm, that his people, coming under the shadow of the cross, might be sheltered.

So about every individual believer's life God is a fortress, in which, in every danger, he may hide and be safe. If this be true, of whom indeed shall we be afraid? The only thing is, to make sure that we can say for ourselves the words, "The Lord is the stronghold of my life." It makes a very great difference on which side of a fortress one is when the battle is raging. Outside its strong walls one finds no protection, while its missiles fall everywhere, dealing death. It is only inside that its shelter is enjoyed. We must be in Christ by a simple faith.

September 27.

The elders . . . said unto him, Behold, thou art old. — 1 SAMUEL viii. 4, 5.

THEY meant that his old age made him inefficient as a ruler. It was a suggestion to him that he would better resign and let them choose some other ruler. They seem to have forgotten that he had grown old in their service; that they owed to him whatever of grandeur or real glory there was in their land. They forgot, also, that his years had brought him more wisdom, and had fitted him all the better to rule them, and that he could do more for them now than ever he had done. Their conduct toward him was most ungrateful.

This fault is too common in our own days. We are lacking in reverence for the aged. We are too ready to ask them to step aside when they have grown gray in serving us, to make room for younger people to take up the work they have been doing so long and so faithfully.

We ought to venerate old age, especially when it has ripened in ways of righteousness and in service of self-denial for the good of others. Those who have given all their life to God's service ought to receive honor and affection from younger Christians. Often they are lonely; we know not what sorrows they have endured, what sad memories fill their hearts, how they crave sympathy and love. No sight is more beautiful than that of a young person showing respect and homage to one who is old.

I am old and gray-headed . . . I have walked before you from my youth unto this day. — 1 SAMUEL xii. 2.

OLD age is the test of life. It is the harvest of all the life's sowing. In its evening shadows the deeds of all the past years appear at their real value. All life's memories gather about the old man's last days, and make either sweetness or bitterness for him. It is a great thing to be able to stand up in old age, and face all one's past without a blush, and challenge every one to witness if anything wrong is known.

Nothing but well-watched years all along life's way can yield such a happy consciousness in old age. We must begin in early youth to grow old — that is, to grow into the beauty and sweetness which we all want to have in our character when we become old. If we would be able to face our own past without blushing when we reach seventy years, we must not do anything during the seventy years that we shall be ashamed to face. If we would be able to challenge the scrutiny of the world, turning the light on every chapter of our life, every page and line, we must be careful that we leave nothing behind us as we go on which any one can bring up against us. It was because that from a child Samuel had served God, and had been exemplary in his conduct, honest, faithful, and upright in all his dealings, that he could now so confidently appeal to his record.

They said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand. — 1 SAMUEL xii. 4.

IT is a noble testimony to the purity and nobleness of a man's life, that in his old age not a voice can utter a word of complaint against him. Especially is it so when a man has lived all his days in public, in the eyes of his neighbors, charged with sacred trusts. The life of Jesus was thus unblamable. Even his enemies, searching with all the keenness of their wicked malice, could find not the slightest thing with which to accuse him.

The aim of every one of us should be to live so that when we come to the close of our days no one can lay any wrong or injury to our charge. It is a sweet joy in our last hours to have others say to us with unanimous voice, "You have never done anything to harm us. You have never treated us unkindly. You never robbed us of any right. You have been only and always kind to us. You have comforted our sorrows. You have encouraged us in our toils, tasks, and trials. You have helped us in all ways, generously, unselfishly, thoughtfully. You have done us nothing but good." To have such a testimony at the last, one must begin early to live an upright, helpful life, and must never allow his hand to slacken until it is folded on his bosom in its final rest.

Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will instruct you in the good and the right way. — 1 SAMUEL xii. 23.

WE sin against our friend when we do not pray for him. Of all the ways of doing good and showing kindness to others, prayer is the best. Sometimes we catch ourselves saying to one who is in sore trouble: "I am sorry I cannot do anything to help you; I can only pray for you." But if we really pray for him, we do the very best that we could possibly do. God knows better how to help him than we do. Ofttimes the help we would give would only harm him. We would lift away burdens he would better carry longer. We would make easy the path which would better be left rough. We are always in danger of hindering God's work in a man's life when we come in with our help. The best we can do is to pray for him.

"Yes, pray for whom thou lovest; if uncounted wealth were thine,
The treasures of the boundless deep, the riches of the mine,
Thou couldst not to thy cherished friend a gift so dear impart,
As the earnest benediction of a deeply prayerful heart.

Yes, pray for whom thou lovest; thou mayst vainly, idly seek
The fervid thoughts of tenderness by feeble words to speak.
Go, kneel before thy Father's throne, and meekly, humbly there
Ask blessing for thy loved one in the silent hour of prayer."

October 1.

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?— PSALM xlii. 2.

ONE may have everything else — riches, honor, human friends, social rank, health, home joys, but if he has not God, all these things fail to make him truly and deeply blessed. On the other hand, if we have God we are blessed, though we have nothing else.

A gentleman came home from business heavy-hearted. Disaster had overtaken him. Throwing himself into a chair, he said, "Everything is gone. We are beggared. There is nothing left." His little child, seeing his distress and hearing his words, climbed up on his knee, and said, "Why, papa, you have mamma and me left." Yes; while such human love remained, was he not still rich? Still more, if everything else is taken, and God and his love remain, are we not rich? Mrs. Browning has put this thought in a beautiful sonnet:—

If I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring,
Where "Dust to dust" the love from life disjoined;
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving,
I stood alone (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moor in weary dearth),
Crying "Where are ye, O my loved and loving?"—
I know a Voice would sound: "Daughter, I am!
Can I suffice for heaven and not for earth?"

October 2.

Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone.— ST. JOHN xii. 24.

JESUS was a very wise teacher. He did not use fine illustrations which the common people would not understand, but took those whose meaning would be plain to them. He pointed to the lilies, to the birds, to leaves, to vines, to the hen and her chickens, and other familiar things.

The illustration here from nature is very simple. The farmer who would keep his wheat in the dry, safe granary, because if it were sown in the field it would rot and die, would make a very foolish mistake. The only proper thing to do with the grain which the farmer wishes to preserve and take care of in the best way, is to sow it in the ground. True, that seems to be wasting it, losing it, throwing it away. But it is thus it is made to increase. It has to die to live. This is the law of life.

Our Lord meant here that the only way for him to be glorified was by giving his life. He could have saved himself from his cross; his sacrifice was voluntary. But suppose he had saved himself, what would have been the result? He would have missed the suffering; but souls would not have been saved, no church would now be praising his name. But in dying he made blessing for a world. From the one precious seed let fall into the ground on Calvary, has sprung a glorious harvest, whose full fruitage will not be known until all the redeemed are gathered home.

The words that I have spoken unto you, are spirit, and are life. —ST. JOHN vi. 63.

GOD'S own life is in the words of Scripture. Put a handful of flower-seeds in your window-box, under the sunshine, and they will soon become lovely flowers. Put the truths of the gospel into a human heart, and soon the life will begin to grow into the beauty of Christ. Its effects will be seen in the disposition, in the character, in the conduct, in all the daily acts.

At an auction, a rude jar of common earthenware was bought by a seller of perfumes for a penny. But he filled it with attar of roses, and soon every particle of the substance of the jar had partaken of the sweetness. The fragrance within it had permeated it. Long, long afterward, when emptied and broken, every smallest fragment was still sweet with the precious perfume.

So it is, when even the most common life is filled with the word of Christ. It flows out, as it were, in the character, in the feelings and affections, in the thoughts and desires, in the tempers and dispositions, until the whole being is permeated, filled with the spirit of Christ. For where the word of Christ dwells the Holy Spirit dwells, and where the Holy Spirit dwells is the kingdom of heaven, heaven begun in a human life. We see the effects of this indwelling in the gentleness, the sweetness, the purity of heart, the truth, the patience, the love, which the word of Christ always produces.

October 4.

I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly. — ST. JOHN X. 10.

TO have abundant life, we must use the life we have. If the child would have his puny arm grow into strength, he must exercise it. The smith wields his hammer, and his muscles become like withes of iron. If you would have your brain develop into mental strength, you must use it. It is so of every faculty and function of the life. If you would have your power of sympathy grow, until you are able to be a true helper and comforter of others, you must find expression for your sympathy. If you would become a true helper begin in little ways. Every outgoing of love in true service makes our love itself more abundant.

Begin with the little life you have, accept every opportunity to use it, and by and by you will reach a capacity for helpfulness and service which will amaze you. But sit down and do nothing, put forth no effort, and your little life will dry up and shrivel to a crisp. "If the stars did not move," said Horace Bushnell, "they might rot in the sky." The curse on thousands of Christian lives is inactivity. Do not use your hand — tie it up on your breast — for a few months, and it will wither to death. The same is true of all physical, mental, and moral powers; unused they will die. If you would have abundant life, use every particle of the life you have, and it will develop until it reaches fulness of power.

A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. — ST. LUKE x. 33.

"O LORD, advertise thy love through us!" was the prayer of an earnest Christian. A young Christian, when asked if she loved Jesus, was moved to tears, saying in her heart, "What a dim light mine must be, if others are not sure that I love Jesus!" A Christian writer has recently said that the deadliest heresy is to be unloving.

God advertised his love through the good Samaritan. Others needed not to ask him if he loved God. He was not guilty of the deadly heresy of being unloving. He had true compassion. He was not content merely to say a few pitying words. His sympathy took the practical form of doing something. He bound up the man's wounds — that was help of the best kind. He stopped the bleeding away of the sufferer's life. He rested not until he had him safe in a warm shelter.

He did not even content himself with getting the man into an inn, then throwing off further responsibility. He might have said, "I have done my share; let some other one look after him now." But he was in no hurry to get the case off his hands. He took care of the man for a time, and then provided for the continuation of the care as long as it should be needed. The good Samaritan is Christ's own picture of what Christian love should be in every one of his disciples.

October 6.

Jesus wept. — St. John xi. 35.

THIS is the shortest verse in all the Bible, but it is rich in meaning. It is a great window in Christ's bosom, showing us his very heart. It tells us that our Saviour, though so glorious, is touched by our griefs. He is the same now in heaven that he was that day when Mary lay at his feet and he wept with her. He is with us in all our sorrows, and sympathizes with us. This alone is a wonderful comfort to those who are in trouble. A little child visited a neighbor who had lost her baby, and came home and told her mother that she had been comforting the sorrowing woman. Her mother asked her how she had done it, and she said, "I cried with her." It does us good when we are in trouble to know that some other one sympathizes with us. It brings us a sense of companionship in our loneliness. It puts another shoulder under our load. But when it is Jesus who cares and is touched, weeps with us, comes up beside us in gentle companionship, it is wondrous comfort indeed.

"Dear Lord, my heart hath not a doubt
But thou dost compass me about
With sympathy divine.

The love for me once crucified
Is not a love to leave my side,
But waiteth ever to divide
Each smallest care of mine."

October 7.

And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up: and immediately his feet and his anklebones received strength. — ACTS iii. 7.

A LADY was asked for her ideal of happiness and gave this answer: "My ideal of happiness is the helping of somebody up." This has the ring of that word of the Master's in which he said he came, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." At first thought most people would look for their ideal of happiness in some possible good or favor to be received by themselves. But this lady was right. There is more real happiness in helping somebody up than in the receiving of the largest benefits for ourselves. This glimpse of ideal happiness shows how near the desired blessing lies all the while to every one of us. There is not a day nor an hour, when we cannot be helping somebody up.

In many climes without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;
Behold, it is here, — this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;
This crust is my body broken for thee;
This water His blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need;
Not what we give, but what we share, —
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms, feeds three —
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

J. R. LOWELL.

October 8.

Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep. — ROMANS xii. 15.

STRANGE as it may seem, it is easier to weep with those who weep than it is to rejoice with those who rejoice. There is something in sorrow that makes its resistless appeal to every heart, touching it with tenderness, and calling out sympathetic expressions. Suffering in another disarms all unkindly feeling, and bids a truce, for the time at least, to all bitterness, jealousy, and resentment. We weep even with our enemy whom we find in pain or sorrow. No one is ever envious of another's grief.

But when we see others rejoicing, it is not so according to nature to rejoice with them. The mood of gladness is not so sure to find sympathetic chords in the hearts of others. There are those who are envious of the happiness of others, and are made even more miserable by their joy. This surely is a most undivine spirit, and yet none can deny its existence in many hearts.

Gladness in others makes no such appeal to a heart as sorrow does. It does not need help. Yet we should mark well the lesson — that it is as much our duty to rejoice with those who rejoice, as it is to weep with those who weep. It is a close test of character — this being able to be glad because our friend is prosperous, even though at the time we do not have prosperity ourselves. It shows a wholesome spiritual condition.

Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, probation. — ROMANS v. 3, 4.

AT first we would say that a home into which no sorrow had ever come is the happiest home. It has had only prosperity. It is a Christian home, too, and has all the blessings of religion. It is a home of love — ideal in its fellowship. But it has never known a sorrow. The circle is unbroken. No tears have been shed in it. We would say that this is the happiest home we know.

But it takes sorrow to perfect love's happiness. There is little doubt that the sweetest home is one in which there has been grief. We do not find the richest things in the Bible until we pass into shadows. We do not see the stars until night comes. There is no rainbow save when there are clouds. We do not find out the richest love even of our human friends while we are strong and well and prosperous; it is only when we are in some grief or trouble that we discover how much they love us. And we do not get the best of God's grace until we are in sorrow.

Besides, grief softens our hearts, makes us capable of deeper affection and sympathy, and draws us nearer to each other. After a household has stood together around the coffin of one of its own, it is a new tenderness that unites the members. Suffering together brings a new closeness in loving. Thus, even sorrow may be put among the elements of home happiness.

Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day. — ACTS xxvi. 22.

IT had been through nearly twenty-five years of hard, toilsome life that the heroic old apostle had stood, never giving up, never faltering in his confession. But he takes no praise to himself. The help came from God.

Many young people are afraid to set out on a Christian life, fearing they will not be able to be true to the end. Here is the word for all such; they will obtain help from God for every duty, for every struggle, for every sorrow, which they must endure. They need only to be faithful day by day, doing the day's duty, and trusting God for grace. The help will come silently, just as it is needed, always grace sufficient, so that they will ever be able to stand.

God never puts a burden upon us without giving us the strength to carry it. The way to obtain help from him is to go promptly forward in the way of duty, asking for the help, and sure of getting it. It will not come if we wait to get it before we set out to obey. It will come only as we do God's will moment by moment.

"A sacred burden is the life ye bear:
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly;
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly;
Fail not for sorrow, falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win."

October 11.

That ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ. — PHILIPPIANS i. 10.

SINCERE means without wax. Many people in Rome's palmy days lived in fine marble palaces. Sometimes a dishonest workman, when there was a piece chipped off a stone, would fill in the chink with a kind of cement called wax, an imitation of marble. For a time the deception would not be discovered, but after a while the wax would become discolored, thus revealing the defect. It became necessary to put in contracts a clause stating that the work should be *sine cera*, without wax. This is the origin of the word sincere. It means that the life thus described is true through and through. It makes no pretensions. It has nothing to hide.

Insincerity in any form mars the beauty of life. Unreal professions of friendship are to be guarded against. So are over-statements of religious experience. We remember in what scathing words our Lord denounced hypocrisy. This was the only sin of which he did not speak with pity and compassion. So in many parts of the Scripture we are cautioned against insincerity. We are to have faith unfeigned. We are to have unfeigned love of the brethren. We are to love without dissimulation. Few things do more harm to the cause of Christ than insincerity in those who profess to be his friends. Sincerity gives influence and power to life.

October 12.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. — PSALM ciii. 1.

EVERY part of our being should join in praising God. The song of praise we sing should not be a solo, or a duet, but a full chorus — the feelings, affections, mental powers, tastes, desires, all mingling in praise.

There are some who praise with their voice, but not with their heart. Others give intellectual worship, while their affections are not engaged. Others give emotional praise, but their will and conscience do not join heartily in the song; they have good feelings, but lack in practical obedience. Some sing missionary hymns with zest, but give nothing to missionary work, or consecration hymns, and then live for themselves. The true way is to rouse every faculty, energy, power, and affection, to hearty, enthusiastic, practical praise, — all that is within us joining in glad and holy songfulness.

Oh, the little birds sang east,
And the little birds sang west;
And I said in underbreath, —
All our life is mixed with death,
And who knoweth which is best?

Oh, the little birds sang east,
And the little birds sang west;
And I smiled to think God's greatness
Flowed around our incompleteness, —
Round our restlessness, his rest.

E. B. BROWNING.

Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust. — PSALM xl. 4.

THAT is not what the world says. It calls the man blessed, or happy, who gets on in business, who prospers and grows rich, or who rises to power. It is along the paths to these places of distinction that the racers throng. There is no scramble for the honors of sainthood. Not many people envy the heroes of Christian faith. Yet as the angels see this world, its highest seats are filled by God's believing ones. If we study the beatitudes, we shall learn who are really "blessed." If we trace the word "blessed" through the Bible, we see who come within the radiant circle.

The man that maketh the Lord his trust is blessed. Why? He has been lifted out of the horrible pit. His feet are on a rock that cannot be shaken. He has a joy that nothing ever can break. His trust is one that no storm or flood, no financial panic, no bank failure, no defalcation, no fire, no political defeat, can ever disturb.

Is it not worth while to have such a secure blessedness? No other trust is absolutely safe, even in this life. Then what about the day of death, and the judgment that comes after, and the eternity? We cannot leave out these stupendous events when estimating what is best. It is not hard to prove that none are really blessed save those whose trust is stayed on God. The question, however, is, Where is your trust? Are you among the blessed?

October 14.

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.— PROVERBS xxii. 1.

WE cannot be too careful of our good name. Many things, perhaps not morally wrong in themselves, when seen by other and uncharitable eyes may yet be construed to mean wrong-doing, and may thus hurt one's good name. There is need, too, of the most delicate moral sense in the regulation of conduct, and the most careful interpretation of duty, lest there be a lowering of tone which shall permit of acts not in accord with the perfect law of right. We cannot hold ourselves too strictly to "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are of good report." A name once tarnished never can be made altogether bright again.

"The fleece that had been by the dyer stained
Never again its native whiteness gained."

How beautiful it is to be alive!
To wake each morn as if the Maker's grace
Did us afresh from nothingness derive,
That we might sing, How happy is our case,
How beautiful it is to be alive!

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Thus ever, towards man's height of nobleness
Striving some new progression to contrive;
Till, just as any other friend's, we press
Death's hand; and having died feel none the less,
How beautiful it is to be alive.

H. S. SUTTON.

Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. — PROVERBS i. 23.

AFTER repenting comes new divine anointing. The Holy Spirit will not enter or stay in a heart that is cherishing sin. But when we turn away from the wrong things, the Spirit will come and live in us.

There is a great deal in the Bible about the conditions on which divine things are revealed. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." These words promise a very sweet confiding — even God tells the secret things of his heart to his children. The condition is, "with them that fear him," that is, reverence, honor, love, and obey him. We have an illustration of this in God's dealing with Abraham. "The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" Abraham was the "friend of God," and the secret of the Lord was confided to him.

In our Lord's parting words to his disciples we have the same truth: "No longer do I call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you."

Again we have the condition of this confidence: "Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you." If we would know divine things, we must submit ourselves to divine guidance.

October 16.

What seest thou? — ZECHARIAH iv. 2.

THE world is full of lovely things which only a few people can see. A lady was looking with Turner at some of his great pictures. "Why, Mr. Turner," said the lady, "I cannot see those things in nature." — "Don't you wish you could, madam?" asked the artist. Many people have eyes, yet see nothing lovely in all the splendors of earth, or sky, or sea. Well would it be if by the side of every one an angel walked, saying continually, at every turn, "What seest thou?" The world is full of visions of loveliness for every one who can see. Says Alice Cary: —

Thy works, O Lord, interpret thee,
And through them all thy love is shown;
Flowing about us like a sea,
Yet steadfast as the eternal throne.

Out of the light that runneth through
Thy hand, the lily's dress is spun;
Thine is the brightness of the dew,
And thine the glory of the sun.

Then in the Bible, too, there are wonderful things on every page. Here, again, we should train ourselves to ask, as our eyes fall on verse after verse, "What seest thou?" If we had this habit well formed, we should be ever coming upon new things. Visions of divine loveliness would rise up continually before us, with their heavenly teachings, and their inspirations toward loftier, nobler life.

For surely there is a reward; and thy hope shall not be cut off. — PROVERBS xxiii. 18.

WHAT you see of the brilliance, the dash, and the pleasure of sin, is only a cheat. Wait till the end comes. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." For a while a wicked man may seem to prosper in his sin; but there is a hereafter, and sin will surely bring its harvest of curse and death at last. Indeed, if we could see all, we should find that even day by day the fruits of a good life are far sweeter than those of sin. No godly young man would envy his gay neighbor, if he could follow him from his dissipation and revelling and see the sickening sequel.

"Sorrow follows wrong,
As echo follows song."

The peace which comes to the heart of him who lives after God's laws is a thousand times better than the remorse which is the portion of the sinner. There would be no envy if a Christian young man could set the two lives side by side, and see them in fair, honest light. One young man was placed in unfortunate circumstances. Nearly all the young men he knew drank. Would he go with them? He took a philosophical look at the older men about him, and saw what drink had done for those who had formed the drinking habit in their youth. Then he looked at the men who had refused to learn to drink. He made his choice. "Surely there is a reward."

October 18.

Their delectable things shall not profit. — ISAIAH xliv. 9.

"DELECTABLE things," are the things in which they took delight, — that is, their idols. They bestowed honor upon them, prayed to them, looked to them as gods. But these delectable things could do nothing for them. We have it all in the old psalm: —

Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands;
They have mouths, but they speak not;
Eyes have they, but they see not;
They have ears, but they hear not;
Noses have they, but they smell not;
They have hands, but they handle not;
Feet have they, but they walk not;
Neither speak they through their throat.

These idols could give no comfort in sorrow, no strength in weakness, no deliverance in danger. Suppose you were an idol-worshiper, and had in your house a beautiful god of gold. Then suppose there was death in your family, or some other trouble, in which you needed help that no human friend could give you; what could your idol do for you?

No better than these idols are other worldly trusts which men have — their money, for instance. Suppose there is sorrow in a home of wealth, filled with works of art and with fine furniture, and without Christ; what comfort can these delectable things give?

October 19.

Even to-day is my complaint rebellious: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.—JOB xxiii. 2.

JOB does not mean that he was rebellious, but that even with his submission to the divine will, he could hardly keep his pain from breaking out in cries. If we are God's children we should bear even the greatest sufferings without complaining. It may not always be possible to repress the outcries of anguish; but even if our complaint is too full of pain to be altogether repressed, we should not have in our heart any rebellious feeling toward God.

An English writer tells of two birds, and how they acted when put into a cage. One flew violently against the wires of its prison, in unavailing efforts to escape, only bruising its own breast and wings in the struggle. The other perched itself on the bar, and began to pour forth from its little throat bursts of sweet song. We know well which bird was the wiser, which had learned the truer way to meet hard conditions.

Some people are like the starling; when they are in trouble they chafe, cry out, and complain. The result is, they only hurt themselves, make themselves more miserable, and do not in any sense lessen their trouble. It is wiser always, as well as more pleasing to God, for us to bear our trials patiently, singing songs of faith, rather than crying in pain and discontent. Thus we take the bitterness out of trial, making it sweet.

October 20.

The children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings. — PSALM xxxvi. 7.

UNDER God's wings is a blessed shelter into which to flee when the world is cold. It is a warm place into which to creep when the heart is smitten with sorrows. It is when we are troubled that we find these wings the softest. We call sorrow a shadow, and we talk about the shadow falling upon us and deepening until sometimes all the light is obscured. Have you ever thought that it is the shadow of God's wings that makes this darkness? It does not seem love's shadow — it seems unkindness. But really it is love. God is never so close to us as when we are in deepest sorrow.

As feeble babes that suffer,
 Toss and cry and will not rest,
Are the ones the tender mother
 Holds the closest, loves the best;
So when we are weak and wretched,
 By our sins weighed down, distressed,
Then it is that God's great patience
 Holds us closest, loves us best.

Oh, great heart of God! whose loving
 Cannot hindered be nor crossed,
Will not weary, will not even
 In our death itself be lost;
Love divine! of such great loving
 Only mothers know the cost —
Cost of love, which, all love passing,
 Gave a Son to save the lost.

SAXE HOLM.

Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. — PROVERBS xxvii. 2.

WE would better not permit ourselves to talk about ourselves. People do not want to hear about you from your own lips. Though your good deeds, your greatness, or your fine attainments do not become known, what does it matter? God knows about them, and that is enough. One says wisely, "Think as little as possible about any good in yourself; turn your eyes resolutely from any view of your acquirements, your influence, your plans, your success, your following — above all, speak as little as possible about yourself. The inordinateness of our self-love makes speech about ourselves like the putting of a lighted torch to the dry wood which has been laid in order for burning. Nothing but duty should open our lips upon this dangerous theme, except it be in humble confession of our sinfulness before God."

I who hear with secret shame,
Praise that paineth more than blame,
Rich alone in favors lent,
Virtuous by accident,
Doubtful where I fain would rest,
Frailest where I seem the best,
Only strong for lack of test, —
What am I, that I should press
Special pleas of selfishness,
Coolly mounting into heaven
On my neighbor unforgiven?

J. G. WHITTIER.

October 22.

If thou seest the oppression of the poor . . . one higher than the high regardeth. — ECCLESIASTES v. 8.

IT is a comfort in a world where so many things continually go wrong, to know that God regards his people, and that he will surely in some way bring justice out of injustice, good out of wrong. He is always on the side of the oppressed, of the weak, of those whom the strong would crush. We naturally pity any person whom we see treated unfairly by others. Our hearts cry out against the injustice, and yet we may be powerless to do anything to set it right. Our comfort, however, is that God sees all this wrong, and not only sees, but cares, and in his own time and way will vindicate the cause of those who are made the victims of the cruelty of the strong. We may safely leave in his hands the adjustment of the equities.

The vindication may not come in this world, but the end of events is not here. Said Anne of Austria, Queen of France, to her bitter enemy, Cardinal Richelieu, "My Lord Cardinal, there is one fact that you seem to have entirely forgotten — God is a sure paymaster. He may not pay at the end of every week or month or year, but I charge you to remember that he pays in the end." One of the strongest arguments for a future life is in this fact, that in the present world full justice cannot always be had. It takes an after-life to right earth's wrongs. But we may be sure that they will all be righted in the end.

The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. — NUMBERS xxi. 4.

THERE are a great many discouraged people in the world. They have lost heart, and when one has lost heart, life is very hard; the wheels roll heavily. No doubt there are things in every one's path that are discouraging. There are hardships to endure. There are disappointments to suffer. Hope fades out like the picture of the mirage, as we hasten on to grasp them. We come up to the very edge of brilliant expectations, when suddenly our path is turned away backward. There are hostile enemies, too, besetting all the way. No wonder we are discouraged sometimes, if we look no higher than the road at our feet.

Some of the reasons why a Christian should not be discouraged by any hardness in the way are, because it is God's way, and he leads; and because the way leads to heaven, and we should be willing to endure any hardships to reach such blessedness as there waits for us.

Hand in hand with angels,
Through the world we go;
Brighter eyes are on us
Than we blind ones know;
Tenderer voices cheer us
Than we deaf will own;
Never, walking heavenward,
Can we walk alone.

LUCY LARCOM.

October 24.

For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up. — PSALM xxvii. 10.

WE all know how much our father and mother love us. It seems to us there never could be a stronger love than theirs. No matter how wickedly a son may act, the love in his father's and mother's heart still continues tender and faithful. Though all the world turn him out-of-doors, the home door still stands open for him. But this word tells us that even if parental love is worn out, and parental patience exhausted, and the home door shut in one's face, there is still a place in God's heart and home for the outcast. This is the verse for the man or the woman who has gone down to the lowest depths of shame, till even his mother — if this be possible — has given him up and shut him out of her heart. God's love outlasts human love.

Then this is the orphan's verse. When God removes father and mother, he himself takes up the child in special love and care. Very desolate is the world when both father and mother are gone. Life is never the same again. There is no place to go with the heart's hunger, and with the burden that is too heavy. Yet God remains, and in the loss of the human, there are first revealed, ofttimes, the warmth, tenderness, faithfulness, and help of the divine love.

If you fear,
Cast all your care on God: that anchor holds.

TENNYSON.

Concerning which salvation the prophets sought . . . which things angels desire to look into. — 1 PETER i. 10, 12.

BOTH earth and heaven are intensely interested in the great redeeming work of Christ. There are wise men who are so busy in their researches into little earthly matters, that they cannot get time to study the things of the spiritual kingdom of God. But nothing in this world so merits the thought, study, and research of the wisest beings in the universe as Christ's work of redemption.

The interest of the angels in Christ's suffering as the Redeemer is very beautiful. There is a picture by Domenichino which represents the scene on Calvary, on the evening after the Saviour's body had been taken down and laid in the grave. The cross is empty. An angel stands beside the crown of thorns which lies there, feeling with the point of his finger one of its sharp points. His face wears a look of wonder. He is trying to find out the meaning of suffering, but he cannot understand it nor fathom its depth.

The artist's thought is, that to this angel the sufferings of Christ were a great mystery which he was trying to comprehend. The same thought is suggested in the words, "which things the angels desire to look into." Surely it is worth while to give thought and attention to the wonderful things of Christ's redemption, since even the angels find in them mystery worthy of their deepest study.

October 26.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. — ST. JOHN xiv. 27.

TWO artists went out to paint each a picture of peace. One painted a silvery lake embosomed deep amid the hills, where no storm could ever touch it — calm, sweet, quiet in its shelter. The other painted a wild sea, swept by tempests, strewn with wrecks, but rising out of the sea a great rock, and in the rock, high up, a cleft, with herbage and flowers amid which, on her nest, a dove was sitting. The latter is the true picture of Christian peace.

Anybody can be confident when there is nothing to disturb, no danger, no storm. Anybody can be happy when there is no trouble, nothing to hurt or vex. Anybody can be patient when there is nothing to make one impatient. Any little lake can be smooth and glassy when there is no wind to ruffle it, or when it is hidden away within a wall of mountains. But we want a religion which will help us to have peace when the sorest trials are upon us. How can we get this peace? Only by hiding in Christ.

"There is a point of rest
At the great centre of the cyclone's force,
A silence at its secret source;
A little child might slumber undisturbed,
Without the ruffle of one fairy curl,
In that strange, central calm, amid the mighty whirl."

I have learnea, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. — PHILIPPIANS iv. 11.

CONTENTMENT depends upon the person, not upon his circumstances. One is content, living in the plainest way, with bare necessaries and no luxuries, working hard and enduring many trials. Another is discontented in a palace, with all the comforts, delicacies, and ease that money can provide. The difference is in the hearts of the two persons. The former has in himself all the resources of contentment, and is not affected by changes in his circumstances. The latter depends entirely upon his circumstances for his contentment, and therefore is affected by every vicissitude.

O heart of mine, we shouldn't
Worry so.
What we have missed of calm we couldn't
Have you know.
What we've met of stormy pain
And of sorrow's driving rain,
We can better meet again
If it blow.

We have erred in that dark hour —
We have known.
When the tears fell from the shower
All alone,
Were not shine and shadow blent
As the gracious Master meant?
Let us temper our content
With his own.

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

October 28.

What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter. — ST. JOHN xiii. 7.

AT this time Peter did not know why the Messiah he really needed was a Messiah with basin and towel. He was thinking of a Messiah with throne and crown and sceptre and earthly pomp. He did not understand it until after the blood of Calvary had been shed. Christ referred to these days by "hereafter."

This saying of Christ, however, may be used in a much wider sense. There are a great many things he does which at the time we cannot understand; yet in due time all of them will become clear. As they appear to us, while we are passing through them, they are unfinished acts; when the work is done it will appear beautiful. This is especially true of many providences in our lives. One time Jacob thought and said, "All these things are against me;" but he lived to see that the very things he thought were against him were really all working together for his good.

So it is always in the providences of God with his own people. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." The tapestry weavers do their work on the reverse side, looking at the ends and thrums, a mystery of tangle and confusion, but not seeing the beautiful picture they are making on the other side. So we are weaving our lives largely on the reverse side. We cannot see the Master's plan till afterward.

I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee. — 2 CORINTHIANS xii. 8, 9.

MANY prayers that seem to be unanswered are really answered. The blessing comes, but in a form we do not recognize. Instead of the very thing we sought, something better is given. The burden is not lifted away, but we are sustained beneath it. We are not spared the suffering, but in the suffering we are brought nearer to God, and receive more of his grace. The sorrow is not taken away, but is changed to joy. Our ignorant prayers are taken into the hands of the great Intercessor, and are answered in ways far wiser than our thought, — instead of earthly trifles, heavenly riches; instead of things which our poor wisdom sought, things God's infinite wisdom chose for us; instead of pleasure for a day, gain for eternity.

Sometime, when all life's lessons have been learned,
And sun and stars forevermore have set,
The things which our weak judgment here had spurned,
The things o'er which we grieved with lashes wet,
Will flash before us out of life's dark night,
As stars shine most in deeper tints of blue;
And we shall see how all God's plans are right,
And how what seemed reproof was love most true;
And we shall see how, while we frown and sigh,
God's plans go on as best for you and me;
How when we called he heeded not our cry,
Because his wisdom to the end could see.

MAY RILEY SMITH.

October 30.

Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. — ROMANS v. 1.

PEACE is a favorite word with St. Paul. His life was full of suffering, care, toil, and trial; yet his epistles are starred all over with the bright word peace. He speaks of different kinds of peace. Here it is "peace with God." This means the consciousness of reconciliation with God. Sin separates us from God. While the feeling of guilt is in the heart there is no peace. We cannot look into God's face. But when we have repented of our sins, and have confessed them, and received God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, we have peace with God.

St. Paul speaks elsewhere of "the peace of God." Writing from a prison, he exhorted his friends to be anxious for nothing, but to make all their cares known to God; and then, he said, the peace of God would keep their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is a step farther than peace with God. It is the peace which holds the heart quiet and still in the midst of whatsoever things are hard and trying in this world. It comes from resting in God's love, and leaving all tangled things in his hands. Christ promised the same peace when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." Peace is named as one of the fruits of the Spirit. It comes, therefore, through having the Holy Spirit in our heart, and is not an earthly attainment.

That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways. — 1 KINGS viii. 58.

WE must be obedient and faithful, else we forfeit the divine promises. We are "prone to wander" from God; our hearts are deceitful and incline to lead us away. Hence this prayer is a fit one to be always on our lips — that God may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, to keep his commandments. We are charged to keep our heart with all diligence. The heart is the fountain of all motive and action, and therefore it must be under constant guard. We in our weakness cannot keep it ourselves, and hence the need of divine keeping.

Fénelon's prayer was, "Lord take my heart, for I cannot give it to thee; and when thou hast it, oh, keep it, for I cannot keep it for thee; and save me in spite of myself, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." This is a good daily prayer for any of us. God will never compel us to be good and obedient; but he will grant to us the grace of his Holy Spirit, if we ask for it, and will incline us, draw us, help us. We need, therefore, to pray continually to him to throw over us the mystic influence of his Spirit that we may seek to walk in God's ways.

I thirst for springs of heavenly life,
And here all day they rise;
I seek the treasure of thy love,
And close at hand it lies.

A. L. WARING.

November 1.

Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. — EPHESIANS iv. 26.

IT is well for us to have horizons which cut off our life for the time, as if it were ended. These temporary endings keep us thoughtful and mindful of the final ending, after which will come no beginning again in this world. Evening puts an end to life's work for a season. We leave the plough standing in the furrow, the hammer lying by the anvil, the axe resting against the root of the tree. We shut the door of the mill or office and go home. Our work is done for the day, and we may never take it up again. Every setting of the sun should therefore be a testing of life. Everything should be finished as if it were the ending of all.

Especially should the hour of evening, when we bow at God's feet, be always a time for setting right all that may have gone wrong in us during the day. Then every feeling of bitterness should be cast out of our heart. Life is too critical for us to venture into any night's darkness and sleep, cherishing anger or envy. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" is a wise counsel.

"Life is too short for hate —
We mingle here but one brief day —
Too brief for what we meant to say,
When it is all too late.

Life is too short for hate:
The tree is green that soon shall wave
Its leafy plumes above the grave
In that relentless state."

November 2.

Paul said . . . Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved. — ACTS xxvii. 31.

THE sailors were needed to help save the lives of the passengers. Yet Paul had said before that there should be no loss of life. He had received this assurance from the angel of God. If it was God's purpose that no life should perish, why did Paul say that unless the seamen stood at their posts and continued to attend to their duties, the passengers could not be saved? Was God's promise dependent on a few heathen boatmen?

The divine assurance did not do away with the use of all proper means for securing deliverance. We are not to sit down and do nothing when we find a promise of God; we are rather to do our whole duty, as if the fulfilment of the promise depended altogether upon us. There is no real conflict between the truths that God has a plan which extends to all things, and that men are free in their choice and responsible for their acts. Theology may find it impossible to harmonize the two, but common-sense accepts both, and does not worry about the harmonizing.

It is clear that the working out of God's purposes depends upon human faithfulness to duty, and that God's purpose of deliverance for us may and will fail unless we do our part. There is no excuse, therefore, for inaction in the assurance that God plans for our good; the plan will not be carried out unless we work it out for ourselves. Every divine purpose depends on human fidelity.

November 3.

Casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea. — ACTS xxvii. 40.

ANYTHING that hinders our getting to heaven we should resolutely sacrifice. An illustration of this is the flight of Cortez, on that fearful night when the Aztecs compelled the invaders to escape for their lives. The vast masses of gold that had been accumulated were more than could be carried away, as each soldier would have to fight his way through. The men were allowed to take what they would, but the commander warned them against overloading. "For," said he, "he travels safest in the dark night who travels lightest." The more cautious men heeded the advice so given, but others were less self-restrained. Some bound heavy chains of gold about their neck and shoulders, some filled their wallets with the bulky ingots till they literally staggered under their burden.

The experience of the conflict that ensued demonstrated the wisdom of the advice given by the commander, and the folly of those who failed to heed it; for all such became an easy prey to the lances of the Aztecs. To save life all else had to be abandoned; and that night poverty itself was the greatest riches.

We ought to see whether there is anything keeping us away from Christ or hindering our faithfulness and devotion; and if we find that there is anything, no matter how dear it is to us, we should cut it off or cast it away.

November 4.

He that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. — ST. LUKE xvi. 10.

WE are apt to under-estimate little failures in duty. It seems to us a small matter that we do not keep an engagement, that we lose our temper and say an impatient or angry word, that we show an unkind or disobliging spirit, that we allow ourselves to speak uncharitably of another, that we treat some one with discourtesy, or fail in some other way that appears trivial. So long as we are honest, faithful, and loving in a larger way, we think it of small moment that we make little slips.

But we never can tell what may be the consequences of failure in even the most minute duty. It hurts our own life. It leaves us a little weaker in our character, a little less able to resist the next temptation that comes at the same point. It breaks our habit of faithfulness, and makes it easier for us to break it a second time. We sin against ourselves when we relax our diligence or our faithfulness in even the least thing. Then we know not what the consequences to others will be when we fail in their presence. An outburst of temper in a Christian has been known to set back indefinitely the acceptance of Christ by one who was trying to begin a Christian life. The failure of a Christian minister to pay a little debt to a man not a Christian but interested in religion, destroyed the minister's influence over the man, and drove him back into the world.

November 5.

Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life. — ST. JOHN vi. 27.

WE need to be continually reminded of the unsatisfying nature of the things of this world, and exhorted to seek the real things in life. We live in a material age, when the quest of men is for money, for power, for things of the earth. Bunyan gives a picture of a man with a muck-rake, working hard, scraping up the rubbish under his feet, not seeing the crown that hangs in the air above his head. It is a picture of the great majority of the people in this world. They are wearing out their life in gathering rubbish out of the dust, not thinking of the heavenly treasures, the divine and imperishable gifts, which they might have with half the toil and care.

"Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking;
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking."

We ought not to spend our life in picking up things which we cannot carry beyond the grave. If we are wise we will seek rather to gather treasures and riches which we can take with us into eternity. Whatever we build into our character, we shall possess forever. Money which we spend in doing good, in Christ's name, we lay up as safe and secure treasure in heaven. All true service for Christ stores up rewards for us in the future. What we keep we lose; what we give in love we keep.

November 6.

I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse. — GENESIS xii. 3.

IT is wonderful how God makes common cause with his people in this world. They represent him wherever they are, and the things that are done to them God regards as done to himself. It is a perilous thing to lift a hand against any of God's people, for he who does so lifts his hand against God. Christ says the same of his relation to his friends. To harm a Christian is to harm his Master. To neglect a suffering Christian is the same as if Christ himself were suffering and we neglected him.

We need to beware that we never do injury of any kind to any of Christ's little ones. On the other hand, all kindness shown to a friend of Christ is shown as to Christ himself, and is rewarded accordingly. Even the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple of his, in his name, does not go without reward. Surely it is worth while to be a Christian, to have such divine friendship, to have God on our side to defend us and to make common cause with us.

The spirit's cry
Is all for thee, O Lord unseen,
To fill the need that hath not been
By any human passion filled,
By any human giving stilled;
For thee, — for only thee, its cry,
O Love supreme, to satisfy!

MARY CLEMMER AMES.

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. — PSALM xxxii. 5.

UNCONFESSED sins are unforgiven sins, and unforgiven sins make bitterness. It is written in the old psalm: —

> When I kept silence, my bones waxed old
> Through my roaring all the day long,
> For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me:
> My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer.

But the moment he made confession, back on the echo of his prayer of penitence came the assurance of pardon, — "I have sinned;" "The Lord hath also put away thy sin."

That is always the way. God loves to forgive. The instant he hears the voice of penitence he speaks the word of remission. So we learn the only way to get clear of our sins — we must put them out of our heart, by sincere and humble confession. Then they will trouble us no more forever.

Some people try to flee from their sins, but they can never get away from them. Their sins are a part of themselves. Some people try to hide from God when they have sinned, but this also is a vain effort. Adam and Eve tried this, hiding in the garden after their transgression, when they heard the footsteps of God approaching. The only safe flight from sin and from God is to God. In his mercy there is secure and eternal refuge.

My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall be glad, even mine. — PROVERBS xxiii. 15.

EVERY true father is affectionately interested in the lives of his children. His own joy, in later years, depends largely upon the way they live. He is made very happy by seeing them make something noble and worthy of their lives, and living honorably and righteously among men.

Notice here, also, the place of the heart in the making of the life. We are never better than our own heart. If our heart be evil, full of wrong thoughts, dispositions, and tempers, our character cannot be lovely and winning. "Beautiful thoughts make a beautiful soul." As we think in our heart so we are.

There is a thought here for parents. If they would have happiness in seeing their children live beautiful lives, they must do more than give them good and wise counsels. Solomon was splendid at advising. His words are full of wisdom. If followed faithfully they will build into a life whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely. But we know how Solomon lived. It is little wonder that his son did not turn out well. Other parents need to guard against the same fatal mistake. No matter how well they may advise, if they do not themselves live godly lives, they will probably draw their children with them to ruin. They cannot by good advice overcome the force of bad example.

November 9.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? — PSALM xlii. 11.

NO spirit is more fruitful of discomfort than that of habitual complaining. It makes misery in him who indulges it and in those who suffer from contact with it. The complaining man is never happy himself. Indeed, he strives not to be happy, since in whatever circumstances he finds himself he at once sets about trying to discover something unpleasant. Of course he never seeks in vain; for people find in this world what they look for. It would not be so bad, if he made only himself miserable, but he succeeds also in imparting more or less of his wretchedness to all he meets. It is about as poor a use of one's immortal powers as one can find, to live to grumble and thus add to the unhappiness of others.

O thou of dark forebodings drear,
 O thou of such a faithless heart,
 Hast thou forgotten what thou art,
That thou hast ventured so to fear?

No weed on ocean's bosom cast,
 Borne by its never-resting foam
 This way and that, without a home,
Till flung on some bleak shore at last.

But thou the lotus, which above,
 Swayed here and there by wind and tide,
 Yet still below doth fixed abide, —
Fast rooted in the Eternal Love.

R. C. TRENCH.

What can David say more unto thee? for thou knowest thy servant, O Lord God. — 2 SAMUEL vii. 20.

WHO has not felt in prayer the utter inadequacy of speech to express his heart's deep longings? We try to tell God of our sorrow for sin, our hunger after righteousness; but we can tell him only the merest fraction of what we feel. Words are never large enough for thought. No poet ever gets into his lines the whole of the vision of beauty which floats before his soul. No true orator ever finds sentences majestic enough to express the sentiments that burn in his breast. Deep, pure love is never able to put into language its most sacred feelings. It is only the commonplace of the inner life that can be interpreted in words. There is always more that lies back unexpressed than is uttered in speech.

In one of St. Paul's epistles there is a wonderful word which shows how God understands our unexpressed prayers. "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." God is able to answer prayer, not only beyond what we can express, but even beyond what we can think. He knows our deepest and most sacred feelings. Even the hungers of our heart, the longings of our soul, he understands. We need not fret because we cannot tell God all that we feel or desire. He reads all that is within our heart, and answers not our mere words, but our yearnings, our longings.

What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep . . . which I hear? — 1 SAMUEL XV. 14.

SIN is hard to hide. We may think that we have covered up our disobediences so that detection shall be impossible; but suddenly something tears away the covering, and they are exposed to the gaze of the world. A man carries on a series of dishonesties through a series of years, and covers them up by expert bookkeeping, thinking he is safe. But some morning he is startled to find that the stolen sheep have been bleating, and the purloined oxen have been lowing, and all the world knows of his peculations or embezzlements.

It is the nature of sheep to bleat and oxen to low, and they have not sense enough to keep quiet when they are expected to. Indeed, they are almost sure to make a noise and reveal their whereabouts just when they are depended on to keep perfectly still. It is the same with sin. It is a poor friend to a man. It professes well when it is offering its solicitations, but when it has been committed it is a poor confidant. It cannot keep a secret. It is sure at some time to betray the man who depends upon it for prudent silence.

In most of our lives there are some bleating sheep and lowing oxen, — faults, evil habits, blemishes of character, tendencies or idiosyncrasies, which tell the story of the imperfectness of our obedience, things which we would not want even our nearest friend to know.

November 12.

I delight to do thy will. — PSALM xl. 8.

THAT is consecration. All ambition should start and end there. Duty is simple obedience. The highest thing possible in this world for any life is what God would make out of it. The Koran tells of the sending of Gabriel to the earth to keep Solomon from sinning; at the same time he was bidden to help a little toiling ant that could not get home with its burden. And the mighty angel did both errands with equal alacrity and gladness. Nothing is small if it be God's will for us for the moment. Nothing is great, however brilliant in men's eyes, if it be not God's will. Here should be our life motto, "I delight to do thy will." Since Christ himself filled his life with such loving devotion to his Father's will, it should be our highest joy to do the same.

"A lesson, Lord, those eighteen years to me;
Not elsewhere could I so divinely learn
That humble tasks are best, howe'er I yearn
For higher sphere where I may work more free.
Blest were those patient, toiling years to thee,
Their secret kept within thy lonely heart,
While thou wast trained by daily skill of art
To build new world for human destiny.
Thy Future was the Now. 'Twas from its height
Thine eye read meanings in the passing day.
If cross of death cast shadows on thy way,
What sun was that so darkened in his light?
O Nazarene, out of these toils there came
That which we prize most dear, — a brother's name!"

November 13.

And the people were as murmurers, speaking evil in the ears of the Lord: and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled. — NUMBERS xi. 1.

THERE are people who can speak of little else but the unpleasant things in their own experience. If you ask them about their health, or even unfortunately put your salutation in the form of "How do you do?" you get as an answer a description of many ills and infirmities to which they are subject, instead of any cheerful reciprocating of your greeting. All their ordinary conversation is filled with dolorous rehearsals of discouraging things. They have keen eyes for the unpleasant happenings and never fail to mention them to others.

We all have troubles — things in our daily personal life that are vexing and annoying, sometimes things that are painful and burdensome. But we should not talk about them. We have no right to scatter our briers and thorns about us so that others' feet may be torn by them. It does us no good, and it does others immeasurable harm.

Silence about ourselves should be a rule almost without exception. Especially should the rule never to complain be an absolute one. No matter how poorly we have rested through the night, we need not tell the whole family about it at breakfast. Patient bearing of the portion of life's ills that comes to us is the characteristic of ideal Christian faith.

And straightway he constrained the disciples to get into the ship. — ST. MATTHEW xiv. 22.

EVEN when Christ sends us out we may encounter storms. It was so here; the disciples were sent out by their Master, even constrained by him to go upon the sea, and yet a terrific storm arose. We must not expect that when we begin to obey Christ we shall have all favoring breezes. We must not conclude, whenever we find obstacles or hindrances in anything we have undertaken, that we are not doing right, and that these difficulties are providential indications that we ought not to proceed in the course. They are providential; but they may have a different mission altogether — to inspire us to stronger faith and greater endeavor.

Jesus sent his disciples out alone; but in all their life they had few more profitable experiences, though the night was one of such terror. They knew their need of Christ after that experience better than ever before. Then they had a new revelation of Christ's power and glory which they never could have had if he had not stayed behind and then come to them on the waves. We do not see Christ's cross until we are left in the night of conviction. We can never understand the sweetness of the divine comfort if we never have sorrow. So it may be a blessing for us sometimes even to go alone a little way, to learn lessons we could never learn with Christ beside us. We can at least learn our need of him.

November 15.

To obey is better than sacrifice. — 1 SAMUEL XV. 22.

MANY people set a great deal more stress on religious ceremonials than upon practical obedience. They will be faithful in attendance upon church services, devout and reverent in worship, and yet in their daily life they will disregard the plain commandments of God. They fill the week with selfishness, pride, bitterness, and evil-speaking, and then come on the Sabbath, with great show of devotion, to engage in the worship of God.

But what God desires before our worship can be acceptable is that we do what he commands us. He bids us to love one another, to be unselfish, patient, kind, honest, pure, true; and unless we obey these commands, the worship, no matter how conspicuous, how costly, how seemingly devout and reverent, is not acceptable.

There are many other phases of the truth. It is exact obedience, and not something else of our own substituted, that God desires. When he tells a mother to care for her child, he is not satisfied if she neglect that duty to write a book or look after a sick woman. When God wants a man to help a poor family in some obscure street, he is not satisfied if instead of that lowly service the man does some brilliant thing that seems to bring ten times as much honor to the Lord. The supreme thing in Christian life is to obey God; without obedience nothing else counts. The obedience must also be exact, just what God commands, not something else.

He put forth his hand, and took her, and brought her in unto him into the ark. — GENESIS viii. 9.

ONE night in a home by the sea, the family sat around the evening lamp. Within, all was peace; without, however, the storm was wild. Rain and sleet beat against the windows. During the evening, one of the group heard a strange fluttering outside one of the windows. Making careful examination, it was found that there was a little bird flapping its wings against the pane. It had been caught in the storm, and was unable to find shelter. The light in the window had attracted it, and there it was beating against the glass. Quickly the window was opened, and the little thing flew in, drenched and faint, but happy and safe. Inside it found shelter, light, warmth, and food.

Often there are lives among us like the bird — caught in earth's storms, swept by temptation, by sorrow, or by passion; defeated, weary, with no shelter. For all such the only refuge is in the heart of God, under the shadow of the wings of divine love. There the weary spirit finds all it craves of refuge, love, warmth, joy, and satisfaction. Flying to the window of the divine ark, a strong, gentle hand draws it in.

"Under the shadow of thy wing
I'll make my refuge, till the cares and fears
Of life are past: then through its tears
For joy my soul shall sing."

November 17.

Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him. — 1 SAMUEL i. 22.

JUST at this time her religious duties were at home. Her child required her attention, and she believed that she was worshiping God acceptably in staying at Ramah and mothering her boy. No doubt she was right. A mother's first duties are to her children. No amount of public religious service will atone for neglect of her sacred home tasks. She may attend Dorcas meetings and missionary services, do good work among the poor, and carry blessings to many a sorrowful home; but if she fails meanwhile to look after her own children, she can scarcely claim to have been a successful worker.

A mother's first duty is to bring up her children for God. Whatever she can do for others after that will be acceptable. Many things must be crowded out of every earnest life, things that are good and desirable in themselves. No one can do everything that needs to be done, and we must select the things we shall do. But it will be a sad thing if a mother allows the proper care of her own children to be crowded out of her life by the appeals on behalf of other people's children, the calls for public service however important, or the cries of any other human needs in the world. These outside duties may be hers in some measure, but the duties of the home are hers and no other's.

November 18.

I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart, and be with Christ; for it is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. — PHILIPPIANS i. 23, 24.

TWO desires draw upon our hearts if we are living in this world as citizens of heaven. The heavenly life woos us with its visions of bliss, its face to face with Christ, its tearless joy, its disinthrallment, its realizations of holy hopes. At the same time, earth has its strong hold upon us. It is natural to want to live — any other desire in ordinary conditions is unwholesome. Human affections form a network of chains binding us to this life. So we are all held "betwixt the two." When one of the Cary sisters died, the other wrote: —

Strange, strange for thee and me,
Sadly afar;
Thou safe beyond, above,
I 'neath the star;
Thou where flowers deathless spring,
I where they fade;
Thou in God's Paradise,
I 'mid time's shade!

Thou in eternal peace,
I 'mid earth's strife;
Thou where care hath no name,
I where 'tis life;
Thou without need of hope,
I where 'tis vain;
Thou with wings dropping light,
I with time's chain.

I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.—ACTS xxvi. 19.

DR. DODDRIDGE, in his life of Colonel Gardiner, describes the conversion of this soldier. He was waiting near midnight, the hour fixed for a sinful meeting with another, and was carelessly turning over the pages of a religious book, when suddenly he saw before him, vivid and clear, the form of the Redeemer on the cross, and heard him speak: "All this have I done for thee; and is this thy return?" Like Paul, he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but from that moment turned and followed Christ.

That is what every one of us should do; when we see Christ and hear his voice, we should straightway leave all and go after him. Not only at the beginning, but all the way through life God sends us visions to guide us. Every time we see in a verse of Scripture a glimpse of some beautiful thing commended, it is a heavenly vision given to lead us to the beauty it shows.

Every fragment of loveliness we see in a human life is a heavenly vision sent to woo us upward. Wherever we see beauty which attracts us, and kindles in us desires and aspirations for higher attainments, it is a vision from God, whose mission is to call us to a higher life. We should make sure that we do not prove disobedient to any heavenly vision, but that we follow every one as an angel sent from heaven to woo us nearer God.

November 20.

The fashion of his countenance was altered. — ST. LUKE ix. 29.

ARTISTS put a halo about Christ's face in their pictures, but there was no visible halo on the face men saw as he walked about and did his works of love. Now, however, for a little while the glory broke through his flesh and the disciples saw it. It must have been an experience of great joy to Jesus. That mountain-top reached into heaven that night; and he climbed up out of the mists and shadows and stood in his native glory for a little while, to be refreshed by the ministry of the heavenly visitants for his dark way of sorrow.

An Alpine traveller tells of climbing one of the mountains in a dense, dripping fog, and standing at last in the clear air, under a cloudless sky. In the valley below him lay the fog like an ocean of white vapor, and he could hear the chiming of bells, the lowing of cattle, and the sounds of labor coming up from the villages that were hidden beneath. Now and then a bird would dart up out of the mist, fly about a little while in the joyous sunshine, sing a few notes of sweet song, and then fly down again and disappear. What this brief time of radiance was to the bird, the transfiguration was to our Lord. His earthly life was spent in the valley, beneath the clouds of suffering and sorrow; now for once he climbed up above the mists into the glory of heaven, bathed his soul in its brightness, heard the converse of messengers from his home.

November 21.

He entered and was passing through Jericho. — ST. LUKE xix. 1.

JESUS had never been in Jericho before, and he never came there again. He was now on his last journey, and in a few days he was dead. Hence this was the only chance the people there ever had of receiving blessings from him. If any sufferers neglected to seek for help just that one day, they never had another chance.

Think what that passing hour was in the history of the old city. Some caught a blessing at Christ's hand as he went by, and they must ever after have remembered with gratitude the face that shone upon them and the eyes that looked into theirs. But there must have been many who did not seize the opportunity and were left unblessed.

Christ is ever passing by. He may come again — he does continually come again; but he is ever moving, and the blessing we would get from him at any time we must get as he passes. All the days seem alike as they come to us; but each day comes with its own opportunities, its own calls to duty, its own privileges, holding out hands offering us radiant gifts. The day passes, and never comes again. Other days as bright may come, but that day never comes a second time. If we do not take just then the gifts it offers, we shall never have another chance to get them, and shall always be poorer for what we have missed. We need to be alert to take quickly from each day the blessing it brings.

November 22.

What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? — St. Mark x. 17.

ETERNAL life is the only thing worth living for. No matter how much pleasure, or how great success, or how high honor, one may gain in this world, if at the end of threescore years a man passes into eternity unsaved, of what comfort to him will it be to remember his pleasant life on this earth?

A rich man failed in business. When he had gathered together the fragments of his wrecked fortune he had in all a few thousand dollars. He determined to go to another part of the country to start again. He took all his money, and had built for himself a splendid car, furnishing it in the most luxurious style, and stocking it with provisions for his journey. In this sumptuous car he travelled to his destination. At length he stepped from the door of his rolling palace, and only then thought for the first time of his great folly. He had used the last cent of his money in getting in this magnificent way to his new home, and had nothing on which to begin life anew.

This illustrates the folly of those who think only of this life, and make no provision for eternity. They use up all their time, their opportunities, their life's strength, in getting to the gate of the grave, and find themselves forced to begin eternity with nothing, no treasure laid up. The only true success is that which makes a man rich for eternity.

November 23.

Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. — ST. MATTHEW xviii. 3.

OUR great Teacher spoke strong words when he said that only those who become as little children can enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is of vital importance that we learn just what the words mean. What is it to become as a little child?

There is a legend of a man whom the angels loved, and wished to have honored in some way. They asked that some remarkable power might be bestowed upon him. They were told to learn what the man would choose. But he would make no choice. Pressed to name some new power which should be given him, he said he would like to do a great deal of good in the world without even knowing it. So it came about that whenever his shadow fell behind him it had healing power, but when it fell before his face it had not this power.

This is Christlikeness, — goodness, power to do good, usefulness, helpfulness, without being conscious of the possession of these qualities. Ambition to have distinction, craving for praise, consciousness of being good, bright, useful, or great, — all are marks of a worldly spirit. In another place Jesus said that greatness in his kingdom is the spirit of unselfish serving, — desiring "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." He who serves others the most unselfishly is the greatest.

November 24.

The word of the Lord abideth for ever. — 1 PETER i. 25.

MEN often make promises to others on which the others depend, perhaps staking all their interests and happiness on the word given to them, only to find at last that the promises have been forgotten. But God's least word is sure and eternal. When a soul takes any divine promise, and builds a fabric of hope upon it, sooner might the stars fall from heaven than that God should forget his word or fail to make it good.

An English nobleman, walking in the country one day, found a little child in distress. She had broken her pitcher, and her family were poor, and the vessel could not be replaced. The good man put his hand in his pocket to find some money to give the child, but had not a penny. Then he bade her meet him to-morrow at the same place, at the same hour, promising to bring her money to buy a new pitcher. The child ran away very happy, reposing perfect confidence in the stranger's word to her.

To-morrow he was invited to dine with the queen at the very hour of his appointment with the child. But he promptly declined the invitation. He would not fail in his word, even to an unknown child of poverty. She had trusted him, and his promise had made her happy. He would not disappoint her for a thousand dinners with royalty. Will God be less faithful to his word? No word he has spoken shall ever be broken.

November 25.

Because to you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf. — PHILIPPIANS i. 29.

WE cannot know in what way we can best glorify God. It may be in work; it may be in quiet waiting; it may be in painful suffering. It is better, therefore, that we let God choose the way in which he would have us serve and honor him. The bird glorifies God by singing its sweet song, the flower by pouring out its fragrance. Mary praised Christ by sitting at his feet, Martha by serving him. If we do simply his will, that will always be the best.

"I cannot choose; I should have liked so much
To sit at Jesus' feet — to feel the touch
Of his kind, gentle hand upon my head,
While drinking in the gracious words he said.

And yet to serve him! O divine employ,
To minister and give the Master joy;
To bathe in coolest springs his weary feet,
And wait upon him when he sat at meat!

Worship or service — which? Ah, that is best
To which he calls me, be it toil or rest —
To labor for him in life's busy stir,
Or seek his feet a silent worshipper.

So let him choose for us. We are not strong
To make the choice; perhaps we should go wrong,
Mistaking zeal for service, sinful sloth
For loving worship — and so fail of both."

If he offer it for a thanksgiving. — LEVITICUS vii. 12.

THE idea of this offering was, that when there was any special favor shown or blessing received, the heart's gratitude should express itself in this way. If the ship arrived safely through the storm, the passenger, as soon as he reached the shore, hastened to present his thank-offering. If one recovered from a dangerous sickness, his first walk abroad was to the tabernacle with his sacrifice and oblation. Should we not bring some new gift to God's altar after every recovery from sickness, every deliverance from danger, every new kindness enjoyed?

There is a story of a Scotch mother whose child was stolen away by an eagle. Almost crazed, she saw the bird soar away to its eyrie far up the cliff. No one could scale the crag. The mother went to her room and prayed. An old sailor climbed the cliff, and crept down with the child. As the mother was still praying, with outstretched hands and shut eyes, he softly laid the babe on her arms and vanished. Rising in silence, she did not even kiss her little one, till she had carried it to the kirk and solemnly given it to God. Should not every life given back again, every joy plucked from death and restored, as well as every new blessing granted, be given to God in solemn dedication before it is put to any other use?

In all things I gave you an example, how that so labouring ye ought to help the weak. — ACTS xx. 35.

ALL Christians are brethren. When one suffers, the others should share the pain. Fortunate people should not forget the unfortunate people. There are some of God's other children who are sick, while you are well; some who are hungry or cold, while you have plenty of bread and are warmly clad; some who are in sorrow, while you have joy; some who are orphaned and homeless, while you have home and friends. You, in your comfort and gladness, should not forget those who are in adversity. Keep your heart open toward them. Watch for opportunities to do good to them. Remember what Jesus said about the judgment day — that the places on his right hand will be for those who have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick, the perishing, and the suffering, and that to these he will say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

When no low thoughts of self intrude,
 Angels adjust our rights;
And love that seeks its selfish good
 Dies in its own delights.

How much we take, how little give!
 Yet every life is meant
To help all lives; each man should live
 For all men's betterment.

ALICE CARY.

We are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing. . . . And who is sufficient for these things? — 2 CORINTHIANS ii. 15, 16.

THE consciousness that others trust us is one of the strongest possible motives to faithfulness. We dare not fail when we feel the pressure of other lives upon us; for if we faint, or falter, or prove untrue, we shall draw them down with us. When a man has lived in such a way as to win the confidence and become the guide of others, he bears a responsibility which he can meet only by unalterable fidelity. Every word of his is believed and rested upon. What if he speaks an untrue word, a word which misrepresents the divine teaching! His example, too, is of infinite importance. Others believe in him so unquestionably that anything they know him to do they will regard as right and will feel at liberty to do themselves. But what if it be not right?

It is a weighty burden which a man bears who has become trusted teacher, guide, and friend of others. If he be not faithful to his sacred obligation, he misrepresents Christ, and hurts the lives that lean upon him. To know that one stands for God to certain human souls, and is set to do God's work, to be the very hand of God to lead, or hold up, or lift up struggling, fainting souls, is enough to crush the strongest, bravest heart, if God be not real to it in his love, power, and presence.

November 29.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves. — 2 CORINTHIANS iv. 7.

EARTHLY success is not the test of spiritual life. Sometimes failure is better than success. God can do more with our weakness than with our strength. St. Paul learned that when he was weak then he was strong, because then the strength of Christ rested on him in fuller measure. Sometimes we do more effective work when we seem to fail than when we appear to get through victoriously. Many a preacher has learned that his best sermons are not those he thinks the best. Ofttimes when he has failed in making his discourse, it has accomplished more than any of his finer sermons on which he prided himself.

It has been said that some of the greatest treasures in heaven will be the blunders God's children have made when trying to show their love. A mother said that the most sacred treasure in her home was a puckered handkerchief which her little girl, now in heaven, had tried to hem for her.

"Close to his feet on the pathway,
Empty and frail and small,
An earthen vessel was lying,
Which seemed of no use at all.

But the Master saw it, and raised it
From the dust in which it lay,
And smiled as he gently whispered,
'This shall do my work to-day.'"

All the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. — ACTS ix. 39.

A GOOD many people have to die to be appreciated. They go through the world living quietly, devoted to the interests of those who are dear to them, seeking no recognition. They are merely commonplace people, and so are allowed to love and serve without appreciation.

But one day they are missed from their wonted place; their work is done and they are gone. Then the empty place reveals the value of the blessing they have been. In their absence people learn for the first time the value of the services they had been accustomed to receive from them. There are many who might adopt, as part of their liturgy of grief, lines like the following: —

"She lived and labored 'midst the lowliest things,
Walked at my side and talked, and oft did fill
The gracious hours that friendly twilight brings
With toil, naught questioning if good or ill
Were hers; soft lullabies she crooned at eve,
Like poppies' breath falling down tenderly
On infant eyelids, that gay sports would leave
To nestle close and sleep upon her knee.
Her life was colorless and commonplace,
Devoid of poetry — I thought it so,
For I was blind, and could not see the grace
That grew through common duties; now I know,
Since she has gone from me and all her cares,
I entertained an angel unawares."

December 1.

Be not therefore anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. — ST. MATTHEW vi. 34.

ONE reason our Lord gives for not worrying about the future is that we have nothing to do with it. Each day has its own duties, its own needs, its own trials and temptations; and God always gives us strength enough for the day. But if we insist upon dragging back to-morrow's cares and adding them to to-day's, the strength will not be enough, for God will not add to the day's portion of strength just to humor our whims of anxiety.

So the lesson is that we should keep the days fenced off, each one by itself. "Do to-day's duty, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking forward to things which you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them." You say, "I could get through with to-day, but this must go on to-morrow and to-morrow." Yet you may not have any to-morrow; certainly you have no to-morrow to-day. When the morrow comes it will bring its own strength.

"One day at a time. A burden too great
To be borne for two can be borne for one.
Who knows what will enter to-morrow's gate?
While yet we are speaking, all may be done.

One day at a time. But a single day,
Whatever its load, whatever its length;
And there's a bit of precious Scripture to say
That according to each shall be our strength."

Go thy way for this time; and when I have a convenient season, I will call thee unto me. — ACTS xxiv. 25.

THAT is the way men are continually doing. They hear the truth and feel its power, but put off action. Felix was not true to his own best interests. He was not honest with himself. He saw the wrong in his own life; he had a glimpse of the judgment; he was terrified; he knew what he ought to do — yet he put the matter off. He did not doubt the truth of what Paul said, he did not actually reject the Saviour Paul offered; he merely postponed action. Some other time he would find it more convenient to adjust his life to the requisite condition.

This is a well-trodden highway, and there always are thousands upon it. They believe the word of God, and are terrified when they think of the awful facts of eternity. They mean to turn and be saved, but they put it off. There will be a more convenient season by and by. It is a terribly mistaken way to do. The best time to repent and be saved is always now. A more convenient season will never come. Countless thousands have been lost by saying to-morrow when they should have said to-day.

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."

December 3.

This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place. — ACTS xxi. 28.

THIS was a case of gross misrepresentation. Paul had never uttered a word against either the Jewish people, the law, or the temple. They had perverted and distorted his words into meanings he never thought of. Many persons thus take the words of others, give a wrong sense to them, and then repeat them.

Misrepresentation is a grievous sin. Many a calumny that destroys a fair name grows from a mere misstatement, an inexact reporting of something said or done. We should be scrupulously careful, if we must repeat what others say, that we state the precise truth. No fault of speech is more common than want of accuracy in quoting. Most people's ears seem to hear with a bias in favor of their own prejudices; then in reporting what they have heard, the bias is too apt to show its influence a second time in emphasizing the distortion.

Besides, when a story travels as far as from Ephesus to Jerusalem, and passes through a number of ears and tongues, it is scarcely to be expected that it will arrive just the same as it started. It is proverbial that stories grow in frequent repetition. Paul is not the only person who has not recognized at all his own words after they had gone the rounds. Let us learn the virtue of accuracy. Inaccuracy is lying.

Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. — ST. JOHN xiii. 1.

HIS own! How sweet the words are! They tell of a close and most sacred relation. His own! We belong to him, not simply as property, but in the ownership of love. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." The prints of the nails tell of the cost of our redemption. We are "his own" because the Father gave us to him. "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." Then we are "his own" because we have voluntarily given ourselves to him. That is what you did when you became a Christian. You accepted the love that claimed you.

The relation is like that between two friends. The world cannot intermeddle. It is a close, personal relation. All believers are Christ's own, but there is a sense in which each one has all of Christ for himself. We all sit down at the same communion table and the banner of love is over all; yet each one has a whole communion of his own. The sun shines upon the broad field and bathes all the million grass-blades and flowers in his beams. But each blade and each flower can say, "The sun is mine; he shines for me." Christ's love is for all his church, and floods the world; but the smallest of his little ones can say, "He is my Friend, my Saviour, my Master." "We are Christ's own." All of Christ is ours — all his love and all his grace.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. — PSALM xxxii. 1.

NO blessedness can ever come to any one until forgiveness has come. Unforgiven sin lies as a heavy curse upon a life. No other favor or prosperity is of any avail while sin remains uncancelled. But with forgiveness comes all the blessedness of life and glory. When we are forgiven we become at once God's children, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ to all the rich inheritance of eternal life. All the blessings of salvation are in this one.

We may study also with profit the word "cover." There is one way of covering sin which brings no blessing. We must not try to cover our own sin. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Sins that we cover are not put away. They are like the quiet fires in the volcano, ready to burst out any moment in all their terribleness. But when God covers our sins they are put out of sight forever — out of our sight, the world's sight, God's sight.

In one place God says he will remember our sins against us no more. The covering is complete and final. The sins are covered by the atonement of Christ. "All we like sheep have gone astray . . . and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all." If our sins were laid on Jesus Christ they are covered forever, and will never rise up against us.

He took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel. — St. John xiii. 4, 5.

THERE are many pictures of Jesus — the Holy Child in the manger, the Redeemer on the cross, the Conqueror with the keys, but none of them surpasses that of the servant with the towel and basin. We get the lesson of service. Jesus did not think his holy hands too fine for the washing of the feet of the twelve men who sat around the table. Many of us think we are too fine in the texture of our being, or too high in our rank among men, to stoop to lowly service like this. This picture of the Christ is a New Testament answer to all such pride and pretension.

Our service should be personal. Christ washed the feet of his disciples with his own hands. Too many like to do all their serving by proxy. They believe in washing feet, but they get some other body to do it for them. They will pay something to a missionary to visit and relieve the poor or the sick, but will not do the work with their own hands. This is not what Christ's example teaches us. We would better do the serving ourselves.

"When all our hopes are gone,
'Tis well our hands must still keep toiling on
For others' sake;
For strength to bear is found in duty done,
And he is blest indeed who learns to make
The joy of others cure his own heartache."

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter. — St. John xiii. 7.

IT is never wise for us to pass judgment on any of God's providences while we can read but a part of their meaning. No work can be fairly judged while it is only in progress. We must wait till it is completed. As the end must sometimes lie far out of sight, whether it be in future years of earthly life, or in the unrevealed life beyond earth's horizon, we need to train ourselves to trust the goodness and the love of God, believing that he will do only what is right and what is best also for us. It is faith alone can give us peace.

I think if thou could'st know,
O soul, that will complain,
What lies concealed below
Our burden and our pain;
How just our anguish brings
Nearer those longed-for things
We seek for now in vain,
I think thou would'st rejoice, and not complain.

I think if thou could'st see
With thy dim mortal sight,
How meanings dark to thee
Are shadows hiding light;
Truth's efforts crossed and vexed,
Life's purpose all perplexed, —
If thou could'st see them right,
I think that they would seem all clear, and wise, and bright.

Adelaide Procter.

December 8.

Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. — JAMES i. 19.

WE are told that we ought to think twice before we speak. Sometimes we are advised if we are feeling unkindly, to count ten before we open our mouth. Yet hasty words ofttimes fly from our lips in the moment of excited feeling; and before we have time to think twice, or count half of ten, the harm is done, the keen word has flashed like a dart into some gentle heart.

These hasty words are spoken, too, most frequently between those who love each other. We control our speech fairly well when it is with strangers or ordinary acquaintances we are speaking; but with those we love best we are less careful. We let our worry or our weariness make us irritable, and then we utter the hasty words which five minutes afterward we would give all we have to recall. But such words never can be recalled. They may be forgiven, for love forgives till seventy times seven times; but the wounds, the scars, remain.

Words are mighty, words are living;
 Serpents with their venomous stings,
Or bright angels crowding round us,
 With heaven's light upon their wings;
Every word has its own spirit,
 True or false, that never dies;
Every word man's lips have uttered
 Echoes in God's skies.

ADELAIDE PROCTER.

Thou . . . hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches . . . lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart. — 1 KINGS iii. 11.

THE Lord approved the choice Solomon had made. It was an unselfish choice. He was thinking of his people, and wanted to be a good king. It was a spiritual choice — not gold, power, victory, and fame, but wisdom to qualify him for duty, to fit him for fulfilling well his mission. Such a choice always pleases God. He loves to have us choose the best things.

St. James says that the reason men ask and receive not is because they ask that they may consume God's gifts on their lusts. The prayer of selfishness is never pleasing to God; but he is pleased when we ask for things to be used in blessing others. The prayer for mere earthly things may really be for a curse upon our life. Midas desired the power to change into gold whatever he touched. His request was granted; and the fruits he plucked, and the food he would put into his mouth, turned to gold, until in the agonies of starvation he was compelled to cry for the withdrawal of the power. It was a curse, not a blessing to him.

So it is with those who live only for wealth; they get it, but their souls are starving. Solomon asked for wisdom only, and left all other matters to God's own choice. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

It was in my heart to build an house . . . But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, . . . thou shalt not build an house unto my name.— 1 CHRONICLES xxii. 7, 8.

GOD was pleased with David's desire, but it was not David's work to build a temple. His part was to conquer the country, and gather materials for the house. Sometimes the things we purpose to do we are not permitted to accomplish. They belong to some other worker who is to come after us, and are not part of our mission at all.

There are many people called to do preparatory work. A man goes to the West, and clears off a piece of ground, building a rude log hut. His son succeeds him, and in the midst of broad, rich acres erects a palatial home. The father's work was just as important in its place, though not so conspicuous, as the son's. One set of men make the excavations for a building, and then put in the foundations. For weeks they toil underground; and then another set of men come, the walls rise up, and the magnificent building attracts all eyes. The foundation work is buried out of sight, but who will say that it is less important than the splendid walls that tower above the street?

But for what David did, Solomon never could have built the temple. It is the same in all life. To each one God allots a place and a part; and if we do that which God gives us to do, he asks nothing more.

If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then . . . I will give thee a place of access among these that stand by. — ZECHARIAH iii. 7.

THE way to rise to higher places is to be faithful where we are. Unless we do well the smaller things which God gives us to do, he will not intrust greater things to us. The man who was faithful and diligent in the use of his two talents saw the two become four, and found himself put in trust also with new responsibilities. The promise here was, that if this good priest would walk in God's ways, and keep his charge, he should have influence and power in God's house, and should stand among angels.

This latter is a remarkable promise. It seems to mean that even on the earth those who are faithful in holy things shall have fellowship with angels. They may not be conscious of the companionship amid which they stand, but really they are working alongside spiritual beings continually while they wait upon God.

Then, those who serve God faithfully and diligently in holy things in this world will be received into the good fellowship of angels in the other world. The lesson, however, is that faithfulness in the common duties of the passing days is the one thing of life with us. If we live thus, God will lead us step by step, even into larger service and greater usefulness, as he may find us ready. We need not worry about our promotion — the only real promotion is that which comes through fidelity.

December 12.

The whole congregation . . . murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness. — EXODUS xvi. 2.

AS soon as the people of Israel got away from visible means of sustenance, they lost heart. It is strange, we say, that so soon they could have forgotten all God's wonderful deliverances in the past.

But are we any more trustful? We sing and are joyful while things go well; and then when want or need comes, away go the song and the joy. There is a great deal of murmuring done yet when Elims have to be left for desert roads. How much happier we would be if we had learned to walk by faith rather than by sight! A promise of God really is a great deal better security for provision in life than any quantity of food in store, or any amount of notes and bonds in the bank. Nothing in this world is so real as are the invisible things of God's love. If we are his children we may trust him absolutely, no matter how dreary the desert may be.

"He who hath led will lead
All through the wilderness;
He who hath fed will feed;
He who hath blessed will bless;
He who hath heard thy cry
Will never close his ear;
He who hath marked thy faintest sigh
Will not forget thy tear.
He loveth always, faileth never;
So rest on him, to-day, forever."

Moses alone shall come near unto the Lord.— EXODUS xxiv. 2.

THERE are always some who are admitted to closer intimacy with Christ than others. In his first disciple family, John came nearest. The way is open, however, for all to come as near as they will. Yet it is not height on earth's hills that takes us closest to him. Those are greatest in the kingdom of heaven — so the Master said — who are most like children; also those who serve the most sweetly and unselfishly. In the psalm, too, when the question is asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" the answer is, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart."

Getting up in the world may not be getting up toward God; yet we may rise toward God, and that surely is infinitely the worthiest aspiration of an immortal soul. Moses was called up near to God that he might get blessings to carry down to the people. Those who get closer to God than others are always privileged to become blessings to the world. God fills their hands with gifts that they are to distribute, and reveals to them precious things that they are to communicate to others.

"When one that holds communion with the skies
Has filled his urn where those pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied."

Gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God visiteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. — 1 PETER v. 5.

WHAT is humility? It is not thinking meanly of one's self. It is not a voluntary humbling of one's self for any particular purpose. It is the spirit which is ready always to use its best powers and its richest gifts in the lowliest service of love. Love is at the heart of it. When we truly love others we are interested in them, and will do them any service they need, however hard or costly or lowly it may be, not considering ourselves too fine to serve them, nor any possession of ours too good to be used in their behalf.

It is not the lowly place in which one lives and works which makes one humble. One may be proud, and move in a very obscure sphere. Humility is in the spirit, not in the station.

"In some still nook dost toil unknown?
Thy simple fare unnoticed take,
Keeping true heart, asleep, awake,
While deeds less brave than thine have flown
Where fame's proud trump is loudly blown.
Work patiently for God's dear sake;
Give what thou canst to hearts that ache.
The Lord some day will claim his own;
And when he counts his treasures o'er
Upon eternity's bright shore,
It may be he will value more
The fragrance of the lily's bell,
Shed richly in its narrow dell,
Than stars whose praise the ages tell."

My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth. — 1 JOHN iii. 18.

MORE and more are Christian people learning that true religion must have adequate and fitting expression in the life. A good creed and activity in Christian work are not the best tests of Christlikeness. It is in Christian character, and in the exercise of the spiritual graces in life's contacts, that Christian culture finds its finest expression.

To put it more simply, love is the true measure of Christian life. Becoming a Christian is simply letting the love of God into the heart. This love is something which cannot be hid. If it is in the heart, it will work its way out in the life. As George MacDonald puts it: "When God comes to man, man looks around for his neighbor." So it always is. The love of God dwells not in a man who does not love his neighbor. The nearer we come to the heart of Christ, the deeper and tenderer becomes our interest in our brothers and sisters.

Be what thou seemest; live thy creed;
Hold up to earth the torch divine;
Be what thou prayest to be made;
Let the great Master's steps be thine.

Sow love, and taste its fruitage pure;
Sow peace, and reap its harvest bright;
Sow sunbeams on the rock and moor,
And find a harvest-home of light.

BONAR.

Buy the truth, and sell it not; yea, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. — PROVERBS xxiii. 23.

IT is not with money that we buy the truth: the price we must pay is our self-will, our pride, our self-confidence. We ought, however, to yield ourselves utterly to the truth, and should do it promptly. He who will not pay any price, however great, to be true is losing where he seems to be saving.

There is a legend of King Tarquin and the sibyl. The old woman came into the king's presence staggering under the weight of nine great rolls of manuscript, containing prophecies and counsels concerning Rome. She offered them for sale, but asked a price so high that the king hesitated to buy them. "Wait till to-morrow," said the king. Next day she came again, but with only six books, having destroyed three; and for the six she asked twice as much as she had asked for the nine. Tarquin again declined to purchase, and the woman again withdrew. Once more she came, this time with only three of the volumes, and asking a yet higher price. Tarquin dared delay no longer, and purchased the books at the cost of half his treasure, for they were of great value to him.

The truth is offered to us, but at a high price. If we delay, less and less is offered to us, and it ever costs us more to buy. The best time to begin to buy God's truth is in gentle youth. We buy it when we live it, no matter at what sacrifice.

He was despised and rejected of men. — ISAIAH liii. 3.

THE saddest thing about the life of Christ was the unwelcome he met among those he had come to bless. He came with a great love in his heart. He wanted to do them good, to draw them away from their sins, to make them love God, to lead them to heaven. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." He went to their doors and knocked, and they kept their doors shut upon him; and he had to go away with his gifts and blessings unbestowed, leaving "his own" in their sin and sorrow.

It is the same yet. Christ comes with treasures of life and glory, which he offers to all; but men and women pay no heed to his knocking and his calls, and he has to pass on. "He is despised and rejected." He never forces his blessings on any. He knocks, but we must open the door. He will never open it himself.

In Holman Hunt's picture, "The Light of the World," the door has no knob on the outside; it can be opened only from within. You can keep the omnipotent Christ outside your heart if you will; you do keep him out by simply not rising to open to him. It does not need dishonoring sins, nor any violent rejection of the Saviour, to make one a lost sinner; the mildest and gentlest indifference to his knocking and call will do it just as effectually.

December 18.

Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. — ACTS xxviii. 31.

THIS is the last glimpse Acts gives us of St. Paul. The glorious apostle appears as a prisoner, though keeping open house and receiving all who came to him. No doubt many came to him with their questions, their burdens, their sorrows. Men with gentle spirit and deep and wide sympathies become a blessing to many people in the world. Those whose hearts are hungry, or who are under the shadow of grief or of sin, turn to them with eagerness, as thirsty animals turn to springs of water. That was the kind of man St. Paul was, and no doubt many came to him with their needs. He had something they had not. He listened to them patiently, and sympathized with them tenderly.

But notice also the kind of help he gave to those who came. He preached to them the kingdom of God, and taught them the things about the Lord Jesus Christ. He fed their hunger with the bread of heaven. He pointed them to the only source of comfort. He presented Christ to them as the only One who could help them and bless them. We have nothing in ourselves to give to those who come seeking help or comfort. We can only point them to the Saviour.

These prison days of St. Paul were among the most fruitful of his whole ministry. We may make our shut-in days full of good for the world.

December 19.

He went on his way rejoicing. — ACTS viii. 39.

HE did not give up his journey and decide to go back among the other Christians because he was now a believer. He went on his way to his own country and to his own business; but he had a new secret of joy in his heart. Part of the duty of this new convert was to carry the knowledge of Christ back to the people among whom he had been living. He had found something which they needed and which would bless them as it had blessed him.

We learn that a new-born Christian is not to give up his work. Of course if he is engaged in any wrong occupation he must give it up. But if his occupation is right, he is usually to stick to it, and carry Christ with him into it. A carpenter when converted is to continue a carpenter — with Christ.

To be a Christian makes one happy. This man went on his way rejoicing. His heart was full of song. The Christian goes on in his work day by day; but while he works his heart sings, and the songs make the way shorter and the burdens lighter for him, while at the same time they give cheer to others on whose ears they fall. As Keble says: —

There are in this loud stunning tide
 Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
 Of th' everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
 Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their task with busier feet
 Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.

The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely. — REVELATION xxii. 17.

A GREAT novelist tells of a child that wandered away from her home. Every night when it grew dark a candle was set in the window, to show to the lost one, if ever she crept back repentant, that love's place was kept for her within. The Bible seems to me like a great palace standing in the centre of a dark world. It has a thousand windows; and in every one of them a bright light shines, to tell earth's lost ones of a home where they will find a welcome if they but come to its door.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest!
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
And he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him."

He that is righteous, let him do righteousness still.—REVELATION xxii. 11.

THE life in the after world will not be different from the life here. The same good things we have learned to do here, we shall continue to do there. Those who have learned here to do righteousness shall continue, in the other life, to do righteousness. We shall still obey God there, and do his will; only we shall be more obedient than we have been here, and shall do his will better—perfectly. We shall love God there with all our heart, and love each other as ourself; our life there shall be a perfect brotherhood, and heaven shall be a perfect home. It will still be more blessed there to give than to receive. They will still be chief there who shall serve. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness, goodness, truth, will still be fruits of the Spirit there as they are here.

Life in heaven will not be so strange to us as we think, if we have learned to do God's will in this world. The everlasting life begins the moment we believe on Christ. While we remain on this sphere it is hindered and hampered by the limitations of earth, but in all true Christian experiences there are intimations of what the full blessedness will be. When we reach heaven the life begun here will go on, only without hindrance, limitation, or imperfection, forever. We are taught to pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Thus we are to get ready here for heaven.

December 22.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. — Acts xx. 35.

We shall have a happier Christmas for ourselves, if we have helped to make a little joy for some others. We give presents to our friends — and that is right; but if we would get the richest blessing from our giving, we must remember also some one who really needs our gift; feeding some hungry one, or sending clothing to one who is shivering in the cold. This is the giving that is more blessed than receiving.

This is taught in the story of Sir Launfal's quest for the Holy Grail. He set out in his gilded mail to seek in all climes for the lost cup. Long he journeyed, but in vain. He came back an old, bent man, yet with chastened spirit, and at his own gate found a leper, with whom he shared his last crust. A voice "clearer than silence" spoke and said to him: —

"Lo, it is I, be not afraid;
In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;
Behold, it is here, — this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;
This crust is my body broken for thee,
This water his blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need;
Not what we give, but what we share, —
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms, feeds three, —
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. — ACTS iii. 6.

IN a story a good man says, "It's very hard to know how to help people when you can't send them blankets, or coals, or Christmas dinners." With many people this is very true. They know not how to help others save in such ways. Yet the needs which these material things satisfy are the smallest needs of human lives. There are better ways of helping, — with sympathy, hope, cheer, courage, inspiration, comfort. These are the blessings which most people need far more than they need blankets or coals or Christmas dinners.

So far as we know, Jesus gave no money. He did not have it to give. Yet there never was in this world another such dispenser of true alms as he was. He gave encouragement, instruction, love. He told people of higher things.

None of us are too poor to give help in the same way. We may not have silver and gold to bestow, but out of a warm heart we can give coins of love which will mean far more than money. We should always keep a gentle heart, and then we can be a blessing to many.

"Who are the blest?
They who have kept their sympathies awake,
And scattered joy for more than custom's sake —
Steadfast and tender in the hour of need,
Gentle in thought, benevolent in deed;
Whose looks have power to make dissension cease —
Whose smiles are pleasant, and whose words are peace."

I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people. — ST. LUKE ii. 10.

IF we are sitting in peace and joy, our hearts filled with sweet Christmas thoughts, we should remember those whose homes will be dark and sad to-morrow, when all over the land the bells will be ringing. Perhaps we can do little to give them comfort; but we can pray for them, and thus call down blessings upon them. For, after all, the best way to send blessings to people is through God. He has thousands of messengers, and he can always send the things of his love where we can send a kindly wish. Here is a beautiful prayer for Christmas Eve in which every Christian heart may join.

"O Lord, there sit apart in lonely places,
On this, the gladdest night of all the year,
Some stricken ones with sad and weary faces
To whom the thought of Christmas brings no cheer.
For these, O Father, our petition hear,
And send the pitying Christ-child very near.

And there be tempted souls this night, still waging
Such desperate warfare with all evil powers;
Anthems of peace, while the dead strife is raging,
Sound but a mockery through their midnight hours;
For these, O Father, our petition hear,
And send thy tempted, sinless Christ-child very near.

Lord, some sit by lonely hearthstones, sobbing,
Who feel this night all earthly love denied,
Who hear but dirges in the loud bells' throbbing
For loved ones lost who blessed last Christmastide;
For these, O Father, our petition hear,
And send the loving Christ-child very near."

They offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. — ST. MATTHEW ii. 11.

THEY were not content merely to worship the King, showing him homage in word or in posture; but they also laid their gifts at his feet. It is not enough for us to sing our songs of praise to Christ, to bow before him in reverent worship, and to speak our heart's homage in words. We should bring our gifts too, the pledges of our love, to lay at his feet.

There is a great deal of mere sentiment in the consecration of many people. It is sentiment only; and when there is call for gifts or sacrifices, or for real services, the sentiment instantly vanishes. People sing missionary hymns with great warmth, and when the collection-plate comes to them they sing on but allow the plate to pass by. They make prayers that God would send laborers into his vineyard, but they do not themselves respond to God's call for laborers and errand-runners. We need to learn the lesson that our singing and praying can never go beyond our living.

Not only did these magi bring gifts, but they brought rich and costly gifts; we should bring our best, — our gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the alabaster box of our heart's deepest love, and the best of all our life and service. Too often we give Christ only what is left over after we have taken all we desire for self-indulgence, or for the promotion of our own ambitions. We should always let him have the best.

Then shall he send forth the angels, and shall gather together his elect . . . from the uttermost part of the earth. — ST. MARK xiii. 27.

THERE is no danger that in the last day any one will be overlooked or forgotten who has been a true follower of Christ. The obscurest Christian, hidden away in the lowliest or most neglected spot, will not be missed by the angels when they come to gather in Christ's little ones. On nearly every battle-field where the slain are buried, there are graves marked by the sad word "Unknown." But if among these there are those who belonged to Christ, the angels will not fail to find them and bring them.

A ship went down on the British coast, and all on board perished. None of the bodies of those who had been lost were found, save the little body of an infant that was washed ashore among the wreckage. The kindly people of the place who picked it up buried the body, and having no clew to its name, put on the little stone simply, "God knows." When the angels come they will know whose body it is, and will not overlook it.

There is only one thing about which we need to concern ourselves, — that we are indeed of those who have accepted Christ and have been faithful to him in this life. It will not matter in that day whether we have been rich or poor, famous among men or unknown; the determining element will be, whether or not we have belonged to Christ.

That they all may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me. — ST. JOHN xvii. 21.

A WRITER tells of a Scotch village with only one street, all the people on one side being of one sect, and all on the other side of an opposing sect. The minister of one of the churches was very ill. As death drew nigh, the light of peace shone into his soul, and made clear to him truths which before had been obscure.

One day he said to a friend, "The street which I am now walking on has nae sides, and if power were given me I would preach purity of life mair and purity of doctrine less than I did."

"Are you not a little heretical at your journey's end?" said the friend. "I know not," was the reply; "names have not the same terror for me they once had. Since I was laid here alone, I have heard the whisperings of the still, small voice, telling me that the footfalls of faith and their wranglings will not be heard in the Lord's kingdom which I am nearing."

The nearer we get to God, and the more of the spirit of Christ there is in us, the less will we, too, think of the things that divide, and the more of the things that bind us together. When we get home we shall see how trivial were the things that divided us here, oftentimes keeping us far apart, and what possibilities of fellowship we missed as we journeyed heavenward.

December 28.

Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough; the hour is come. — ST. MARK xiv. 41.

WE need to learn the importance of timeliness in duty. There are many things which if done to-day will prove untold blessings, but which to-morrow it will not be worth while to do. It is to-day the sick neighbor needs your visit, your help; to-morrow he may be well, or others shall have ministered to him, or he may be dead. It is to-day that the tempted one needs your cheer; to-morrow he may be defeated, lying in the dust of shame. To-morrow is a fatal word; countless thousands of hopes have been wrecked on it.

"If you have gentle words and looks, my friends,
To spare for me — if you have tears to shed
That I have suffered — keep them not, I pray,
Until I hear not, see not, being dead.

If you have flowers to give — fair lily buds,
Pink roses, daisies (meadow stars that be
Mine own dear namesakes), let them bloom and make
The air, while yet I breathe it, sweet for me.

For loving looks, thought fraught with tenderness,
And kindly tears, though they fall thick and fast,
And words of praise, alas! can naught avail
To lift the shadows from a life that's past;

And rarest blossoms, what can they suffice,
Offered to one who can no longer gaze
Upon their beauty? Flowers on coffins laid
Impart no sweetness to departed days."

December 29.

So teach us to number our days, that we may get us an heart of wisdom. — PSALM XC. 12.

THERE are several ways of numbering our days. One way is merely to count them off as we tear off the daily leaves of our calendar. Each evening a man has one day less to live. But that is not true numbering. Another way is merely to count the days into the aggregate of life. A man is one day older — but that is all. He is no better. He has left no worthy record on the day's page. The true numbering is that which fills the days as they pass with records of good and beautiful living, and with lines of growth in character.

Just now we are looking back over the story of a closing year. What have we given the days to keep for us? What lessons of wisdom have we learned from them, as one by one they have passed? There is little good in worrying over the failures of the year, but we ought to learn from our past. He is the wise man, not who makes no mistakes, but who does not repeat his mistakes.

Are you rich in the years of bright gold
Yet untold?
Do they leisurely go,
Like a dream that is fair,
Or a prayer?
Oh, be wise; use them well! You shall know
How the years, growing shorter, with good can increase,
And a life at the end be transfigured with peace.

MARIANNE FARNINGHAM.

December 30.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever. — HEBREWS xiii. 8.

WE leave many things behind us as we go on. We can never go back again over the closing year. We never go over any life-path a second time. We never pass a second time through any experience. We have infancy once, childhood once, youth once, manhood and womanhood once, old age once, and we die once. We are forever leaving things, places, conditions, and experiences behind us. But through all these we have the same Christ, unchanged, unchanging.

The old ark was carried forward into the new land of promise, and still led the people. The Christ of childhood and of youth remains the Christ of manhood and of old age. Whatever changes the years bring to us, we must ever keep our eyes on the living Christ. He will always be all we need. There will never be a path which he cannot find for us and show us. There will never be a dark valley which he cannot light up for us. There will never be a battle which he cannot fight for us. There will never be an experience through which he cannot safely take us. We are leaving the old year behind, but we are not leaving Christ in the dead year. We need not be afraid, therefore, to go forward, if we go with him. We have not passed this new way heretofore, and it is all strange to our inexperience; but Christ knows and he will guide us, and all will be well if we put our hand in his.

December 31.

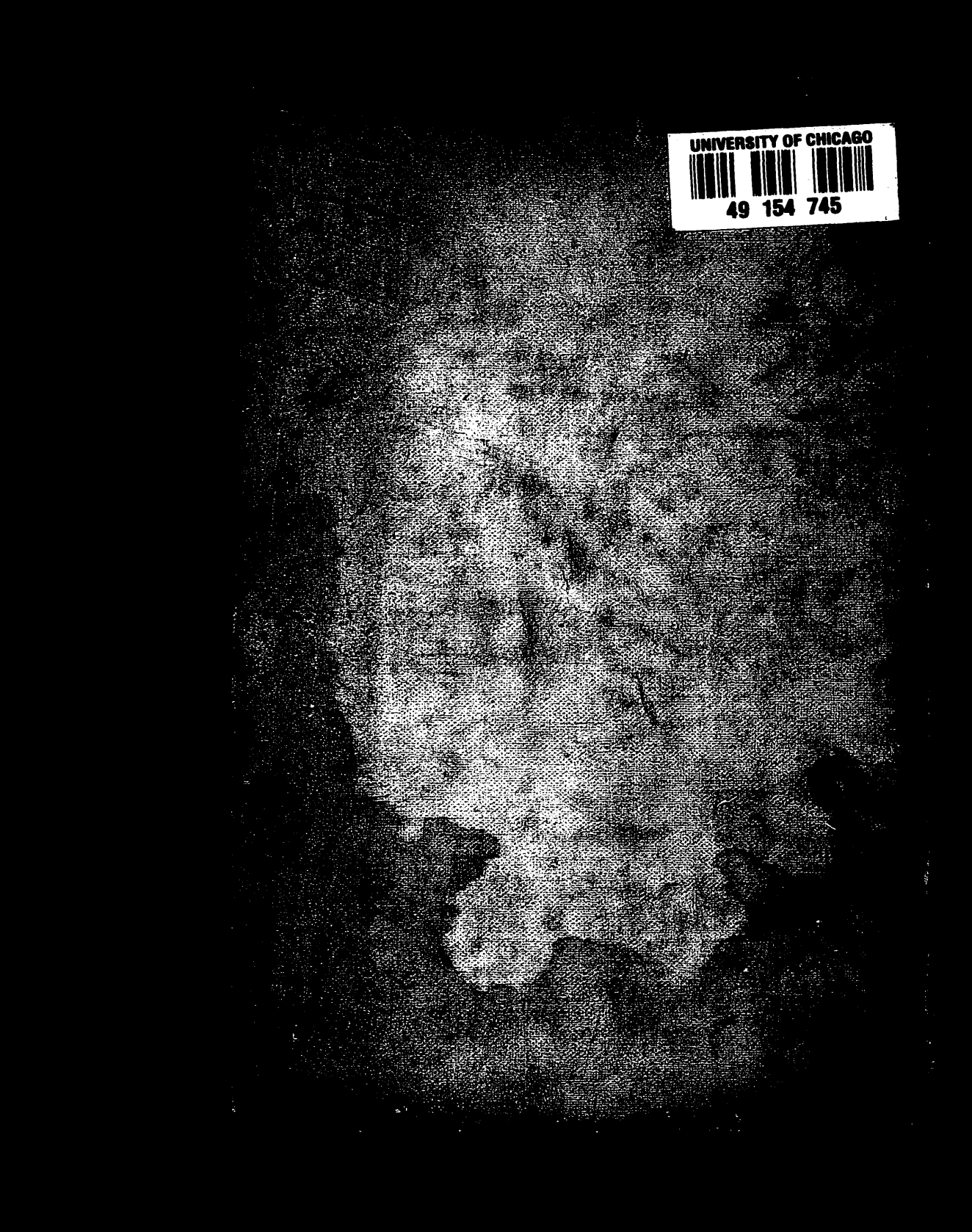
Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before. — PHILIPPIANS iii. 13.

THERE is a proper use of past experiences. We should remember our past lost condition to keep our hearts ever humble. We should remember the lessons learned from past experience so as to profit by our mistakes. The true science of living is not to make no mistakes, which is impossible, but not to commit the same mistakes a second time.

We should remember past mercies and blessings. If we do, our past will shine down upon us like a sky full of stars. Such remembering of the past will keep the gratitude ever fresh in our heart, and the incense of praise ever burning on the altar. Such a house of memory becomes a refuge to which we may flee in trouble. When sorrows gather thickly; when trials come on like the waves of the sea; when the sun goes down and every star is quenched, and there seems nothing bright in all the present — then the memory of a past full of goodness, a past in which God never once failed us, becomes a holy refuge for us, a refuge gemmed and lighted by the lamps of other and brighter days. Thus there are right uses of the past.

But there is a sense in which we should altogether forget our past. It is unwise to live looking back. We should keep our eyes ever turned forward to new hopes, new attainments, new achievements.

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